



# Midwifery Education Accreditation Council

## Setting the Standards for Midwifery Education

May 10, 2013

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### MEAC MEMBER SCHOOLS LETTER #7

#### Update on Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA)

Dear Member Schools:

You are all aware that as an accreditor, MEAC is accountable to the federal government. Monitoring the ever-changing regulations and politics of higher education is no easy task. This is a job that we take seriously at MEAC, keeping our eye out for news that may impact our work as an accrediting agency, and ultimately your work, as institutions or programs of higher education.

In recent years, we have seen growing concern about:

- student loan default rates
- low graduation or student completion rates
- poor graduation placement rates

In an effort to address these concerns, there has been **increasing regulation** (like state authorization for distance education), and **increasing interest in transparency** about the quality of institutions of higher education. Policy makers are discussing the merits of making quality measures (like accreditation reports) available to consumers, and the possibility of nationalizing quality standards for higher education. These issues are expected to take center stage in Washington DC over the next year because the Higher Education Act will be going through reauthorization this year and next.

#### What is the Higher Education Act (HEA) and what does “reauthorization” mean?

In 1965, the federal government passed the original Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 “to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education.” It increased federal money given to universities, created scholarships, gave low-interest loans for students, and established a National Teachers Corps. Financial Aid is covered in Title IV of the HEA.

In the United States Congress, an authorization bill is a proposed law that permits the federal government to carry out functions and programs. Authorization bills are generally contrasted with appropriations bills, which are laws that provide funding for programs that are already authorized. *In order for the federal government to legally carry out an action, it must both be authorized and have money available to fund any expenditures needed to act.*

U.S. Department of Education Recognized Agency

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The current HEA is set to expire at the end of 2013. Before each reauthorization, Congress amends programs, changes the language and policies of existing programs, or makes other changes.

### **Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA)**

Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have begun hearings in preparation for HEA reauthorization. On April 25th the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the U.S. House of Representatives issued a letter seeking input from higher education stakeholders in preparation for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The reauthorization is expected to begin in 2014. The committee is particularly interested in examining ways to:

- empower students as consumers in higher education,
- simplify and improve the student aid and loan programs,
- increase college accessibility, affordability and completion,
- encourage institutions to reduce costs,
- promote innovation to improve access to and delivery of higher education, and
- balance the need for accountability with the burden of federal requirements.

The letter asked that recommendations be specific, including citing current statutory language or regulations and detailing suggested changes, with proposed legislative language where possible. Letters should be sent to [HEA.Reauth@mail.house.gov](mailto:HEA.Reauth@mail.house.gov) by August 2, 2013.

### **What is MEAC doing about the reauthorization of the HEA?**

As you all know, with only ten accredited schools, MEAC's resources are very limited. We are not able to attend hearings in Washington DC. We are fortunate, however, to have a membership in the Association for Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). This membership provides us with analysis of the latest issues in the federal government, a voice at the national level and professional connections with other specialized accreditors. Midwifery education has a seat at the table with physical therapy, veterinary medicine, dentistry, teachers, occupational therapy, public health education, etc. Annual dues to ASPA are made possible by the sustaining fees paid by each of our member schools.

If you are not familiar with ASPA, I highly encourage you to visit their website: [www.aspa-usa.org](http://www.aspa-usa.org) I have also shared a link to a recent podcast with the President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). This 20 minute podcast provides a terrific summary of the issues facing the accreditation community in this next reauthorization. Visit: [www.cheanews.org](http://www.cheanews.org)

We will do our best to keep you informed of these issues as Congress begins its hearings on these very important topics which will have an impact on the work we all do in midwifery education.

Sincerely,

Sandra Bitonti Stewart