

APPENDIX A

“Development of Specialized Accreditation for
Emergency Management Degree Programs”

Development of Specialized Accreditation for Emergency Management Degree Programs

A Paper Presented by Alan G. Walker

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Introduction

Emergency management is rapidly emerging as one of this nation's newest and perhaps most vital academic fields. It seems at no time in recent history has the need for leadership in the field of emergency management been greater. This is due, in part, not only to the increased volatility of nature, but also the complex and changing milieu that reflects our society. This demands more highly skilled leaders who are able to best position communities for times of crisis. Of the five elements that characterize emergency management, today a greater emphasis is wisely being placed upon preparedness and mitigation. One of the essential elements to effectively mitigating this nation's level of risk from natural and man-made disasters is to invest heavily in the preparation of those who are entrusted to manage that risk. Historically, our nation's colleges and universities have been incubators for emerging leaders. Therefore, every opportunity to strengthen and expand an academic area of study in a field so vital to the public interest, should be vigorously pursued.

A cornerstone in the advancement of most professions and their respective academic fields has been the development of specialized accreditation. While it is necessary and appropriate that leaders in emergency management and educators participating in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Higher Education Project focus on a number of issues related to establishing and strengthening degree programs in emergency management such as, needs assessment, course/program development, and review of degree program models, the purpose of this paper is to establish a framework within which this focus should take place. Many times, evaluation of program quality through specialized accreditation is an afterthought which follows development. For example, fire-related degree programs have existed in large numbers for several decades, and only recently has this issue been addressed. The question of quality and how it's to be assessed, must be an integral component to the development of emergency management degree programs. Industry standards and methods for measuring and improving program quality and student learning outcomes (essential elements of specialized accreditation) must be developed on a concurrent basis with curriculum and programs. A specialized accreditation system for degree programs in emergency management will provide the foundation needed for recognition, viability and long-term strength and stability. Indeed, such a system may also have a promulgating effect because it could provide some guidance for those institutions that contemplate establishing new degree programs in emergency management but lack a framework on which to base such programs.

In order to provide a solid foundation for the future development of a specialized accreditation system for degree programs in emergency management, the purpose of this paper is to provide the following:

1. A description of general principles of accreditation in American higher education.
2. An overview of the history of postsecondary accreditation as well as the development of specialized accreditation (with specific examples from other disciplines).

3. A detailed description of the history and development of accreditation for fire related degree programs.
4. A discussion of some contemporary issues in accreditation.

In providing a detailed account of the development of an accreditation system for fire related degree programs, it is not necessarily the intent to suggest that the strategies and methodologies described be used as a model or basis for the development of an accreditation system for emergency management related degree programs. The primary purpose of the narrative is to share one organization's unique experience with such an undertaking and to identify issues with which it had to deal in so much as others who follow may learn from them.

General Principles of Accreditation in American Higher Education

The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) Handbook (1990) describes accreditation as:

. . . a system for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs affiliated with those institutions for a level of performance, integrity, and quality, which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve. In the United States this recognition is extended primarily through nongovernmental, voluntary institutional or professional associations. These groups establish criteria for accreditation, arrange site visits, evaluate those institutions and professional programs which desire accredited status, and publicly designate those which meet their criteria. (p. 3)

In most other countries, the establishment and maintenance of educational standards is the responsibility of a central government bureau. In the United States, however, public authority in education is constitutionally reserved to the states. The system of voluntary nongovernmental evaluation, called accreditation, has evolved to promote both regional and national approaches to the determination of educational quality. Although accreditation is basically a private voluntary process, accrediting decisions are used as a consideration in many formal actions-by governmental funding agencies, scholarship commissions, foundations, employers, counselors, and potential students. Accrediting bodies have, therefore, come to be viewed as quasi-public entities with certain responsibilities to the many groups that interact with the educational community.

There are two fundamental types of accreditation practiced in the United States: institutional accreditation and specialized accreditation. Institutional accreditation granted by the regional and national accrediting commissions of schools and colleges collectively serves most of the institutions chartered or licensed in the United States and accredits total operating units only (COPA, 1990). Committees or commissions within national professional associations accredit professional and occupational schools and programs within colleges and universities. In describing the nature of specialized accreditation in the United States, the COPA Handbook (1990) goes on to say:

Specialized accreditation of professional and occupational schools and programs is granted by commissions on accreditation set up by national professional organizations in such fields as business, dentistry, engineering, and law. Each of these groups has distinctive definitions of eligibility, criteria for accreditation, and operating procedures but all have undertaken accreditation activities primarily to provide quality assurances concerning educational preparation of members of the profession or occupation. Many of the specialized accrediting bodies will consider requests for accreditation reviews only from programs affiliated with institutions holding institutional accreditation. Some specialized bodies, however, accredit professional programs at institutions not otherwise accredited. These are generally independent institutions offering only the particular specified discipline or course of study in question. (p. 3)

Specialized and institutional accreditation share common objectives directed toward improving education. These include: (COPA, 1990):

- Foster excellence in postsecondary education through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing educational effectiveness.
- Encourage improvement through continuous self-study and review.
- Assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution or program has clearly defined and appropriate objectives, maintains conditions under which their achievement is expected, accomplishes them substantially, and will continue to do so.
- Provide counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions and programs.
- Endeavor to protect institutions against encroachments that might jeopardize their educational effectiveness or academic freedom. (p. 4)

Accreditation works towards these objectives by requiring institutions and programs to: “. . . examine their goals, activities and achievements; consider the expert criticism and suggestions of a visiting team; and determine internal procedures for action on recommendations from the accrediting body” (COPA, 1990, p. 3). Periodic review of accreditation status encourages institutions and professional programs to maintain continuous self-study and improvement mechanisms. In describing accreditation procedures, the COPA (1990) Handbook states:

The accrediting process is continuously evolving. The trend has been from quantitative to qualitative criteria, from the early days of census and data collection, then simple checklists to an increasing interest and emphasis on measuring the outcomes of educational experiences. The process begins with the institutional or programmatic self-study, a comprehensive effort to measure progress according to previously accepted objectives. The self-study considers the interests of a broad cross-section of constituencies—students, faculty, administrators, alumni, trustees, and in some circumstances, the local community. The resulting report is reviewed by the appropriate accrediting commission and serves as the basis for evaluation by a site visit team from the accrediting group. The site visit

team normally consists of professional educators (faculty and administration), specialists selected according to the nature of the institution, and members representing specific public interests. The visiting team assesses the institution or program in light of the self-study and adds judgments based on its own expertise and external perspective. The team then prepares an evaluation report reviewed by the institution or program for factual accuracy. The original self-study, the team report, and any response the institution or program may wish to make is forwarded to the accreditation commission. The review body uses these materials as the basis for action regarding the accreditation status of the institution or program. Negative actions may be appealed according to established procedures of the accrediting body. (p. 3-4)

Although accreditation is generally granted for a specific term, accrediting bodies hold their member institutions and programs continually responsible to their educational peers, to the constituents they serve, and to the public. They carry out this aim by reserving the right to review member institutions or programs at any time for cause (COPA, 1990). Reasons for such a review typically include the following: changes in program sponsorship; program mergers; complaints and evidence of noncompliance; additions or major changes of program; and items which substantially impact program policies, staff, curriculum, reputation, financial, or legal status.

Many organizations that conduct accreditation hold membership or are recognized by one or both of the following organizations: the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA); the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

The Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) is an organization whose members are specialized and professional accreditors. ASPA-member accreditors set national educational standards for entry into about 40 specialized disciplines or defined professions. ASPA, a 501(c)(3) association, works with higher education and government officials to enhance education and accreditation and functions as the only national voice for this important constituency (ASPA, 2000).

The purpose of ASPA is to (ASPA, 2000):

1. Promote quality and integrity in non-governmental specialized and professional accreditation of post-secondary programs and institutions.
2. Provide a forum for discussion and analysis and a mechanism for common action for those concerned with specialized and professional accreditation.
3. Address accreditation issues in educational, governmental, and public policy contexts and communicate with the public about accreditation.
4. Facilitate collaboration among programs, institutions, and accreditation organizations.

5. Provide a mechanism for continuing education for individuals and organizations with accreditation responsibility.

ASPA provides its members with a forum representing specialized accreditation; it contributes to a unified, national voice for, and supports the importance of, specialized accreditation; and provides a strong common voice on important issues (ASPA, 2000). In addition, ASPA provides (ASPA, 2000):

- Opportunities for net-working/interaction with peers; participation in the community of specialized accreditors; knowledge of what others are doing; and the opportunity and means to improve performance.
- Professional development; opportunities to learn from other accreditors and educators.
- Source of up-to-date information on pertinent issues; way to be informed about broad/important developments.
- Representation with/to broader communities.
- Added credibility with institutional personnel.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) was established in 1996 as a non-profit organization, CHEA also acts as the national policy center and clearinghouse on accreditation for the entire higher education community. This extensive community includes (CHEA, 2000):

- colleges and universities throughout the country;
- regional associations and higher education commissions that accredit schools and institutions across the country;
- national accrediting bodies for special-mission institutions;
- specialized groups that accredit specific disciplines and professions;
- national higher education associations head-quartered in Washington, D.C.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation's mission is to (CHEA, 1996):

... serve students and their families, colleges and universities, sponsoring bodies, governments, and employers by promoting academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and will coordinate and work to advance self-regulation through accreditation.

To realize this mission, CHEA (2000):

- coordinates research, analysis, debate, meetings, and other activities and processes that improve accreditation;
- collects and disseminates data and information about accreditation, its "best practices" and quality assurance;

- fosters communication and exchange on accreditation issues within the higher education community;
- mediates disputes between institutions of higher learning and accreditors, as necessary; and works through accreditation to maintain institutional quality and diversity.

The purposes of CHEA include the following (CHEA, 2000):

- providing a needed public voice - speaking to the state of quality in higher education;
- warranting quality - setting expectations for quality primarily through formal recognition of accrediting organizations;
- serving constituents - assisting colleges, universities, accrediting organizations, students through e.g. information-sharing and enhancing usefulness of accreditation

CHEA is currently working on five fronts (CHEA, 2000):

1. **Advocating with the Federal Government**

Positioning CHEA with Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and the states as the quality assurance organization, while coordinating a successful effort for higher education in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

2. **Exploring Quality Assurance of Distance Education**

Working on this emerging central issue for colleges and universities and the accreditation community through studies, surveys, and conferences.

3. **Rethinking Recognition**

Working on a new set of standards by which CHEA will recognize (i.e., "certify") accrediting bodies whose accreditation process not only evaluates educational quality, but also encourages organizational transformation as well as better public communication about accreditation results.

4. **Building Relationships and Strengthening Its National Voice**

Establishing respect and acceptance for CHEA as the preeminent national voice for accreditation, accountability, and quality assurance in higher education by identifying (through meetings, research, and focus groups) and promoting discussion of key accreditation issues within the higher education community.

5. **Expanding Service and Information to Members and Constituents**

Providing better assistance and information on accreditation issues, policy, practice and research to colleges and universities, accreditation organizations, the higher education community, and the Washington higher education associations.

History of Postsecondary Accreditation in America

The common ancestral event from which the present systems of institutional and specialized accreditation descended can be traced back to the establishment of the New York Board of Regents in 1784. This organization had licensing, regulatory and planning authority over all educational institutions in its jurisdiction (Gannon, 1993). It was the first of its kind in the United States. Over the next two hundred years, regional and professional associations developed voluntary systems for approving programs, although states were involved to some extent.

The first professional association, the American Medical Association (AMA) was founded in 1847. At about this time, states began enacting licensing statutes intended to protect the professions, combat fraud and the low quality of educational programs (Gannon, 1993). Concurrently, following the lead of the AMA, other professional associations began forming in fields such as architecture and veterinary medicine. One of the primary activities of these new associations was to review preparatory programs in colleges and universities (Gannon, 1993).

In 1867, the United States Bureau (later known as Office) of Education was founded. Its primary function was to provide statistical information such as numbers of colleges operating, and numbers of teachers and students (Gannon, 1993). In 1885, the first regional association of colleges and universities was formed (New England). Gannon reports that the New England Regional Association, made up of high school and college heads, was established to pursue interests common to colleges and preparatory schools. The establishment of other regional associations followed New England: the Middle States was founded in 1887; Southern in 1895; North Central in 1895; Northwest in 1917; and Western in 1924 (Gannon, 1993). The first regional accreditation of a college/university was granted by North Central in 1910.

Development of Specialized Accreditation.

The period of time from just prior to 1920 to the mid-1930s produced many discipline specific national professional associations with medicine, and the AMA in particular, emerging as the leader in accreditation practices. Specialized accreditation was developed by professional associations as a result of their concern over the quality of educational preparation for entry into professional practice (Stedman, 1980). National efforts to direct and improve the accreditation process have continued over the years. In 1956, the National Commission on Accrediting (NCA) began publishing a list of recognized accrediting associations and adopted formal criteria for recognizing accrediting agencies (Shawen, 1983).

In many cases, professional associations formed coalitions with educators and/or regulators to develop and administer specialized accreditation. For example, in 1942 the organization that accredits medical education programs leading to a medical degree was founded as a collaboration between the American Medical Association (AMA) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) (Kassebaum, 1992). This was done

in response to the emergency conditions brought about by World War II. Kassebaum (1992) points out that prior to 1942, the AMA and the AAMC tended to go their separate ways. The AMA represented the interests of the practicing profession and the AAMC those of the educational institutions. Kassebaum (1992) reports that the two organizations met in 1942 for some very specific reasons:

. . . to create a united front to protect medical students from the wartime draft, to find economies in carrying out the profession's duties to assure the quality of medical education, and to survey medical schools that were being affected by pressure for continuous sessions and accelerated medical training. (p. 85)

The original statement found in this work regarding the social responsibility of medical education is still applied to accreditation requirements today.

Not only were there scenarios where specialized accreditation developed as a collaboration between practitioners and educators, in some cases regulators played a role as well. For example, accreditation of pharmaceutical education came about because of a tripartite effort on the part of educators (American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy-AACP), regulators (National Association of Boards of Pharmacy-NABP), and practitioners (American Pharmaceutical Association-APhA) (Hodapp, 1988). In some cases, the nature of the relationship between educators, regulators and practitioners in an organization that performed specialized accreditation was subject to a variety of influences including recognition from third party national organizations such as the National Commission on Accrediting (which later became the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation). Changes in these relationships influenced the nature of governance structure, membership, policy issues, as well as ideology. For example, in 1954 the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was founded following discussions between key national educational organizations. The intent of this effort was to establish a semi-autonomous agency for national accreditation in teacher education (Christensen, 1985). Prior to 1954, the accreditation of teacher education was done by the American Association of Teacher Colleges (AATC) as part of its membership requirements.

Christensen (1985) describes the initial efforts of NCATE to become recognized by the National Commission on Accrediting (NCA-forerunner to COPA). The first attempt failed because of the concern NCA had over what it considered to be “. . . excessive representation from state legal agencies in this private, nongovernmental accrediting agency” (Christensen, p. 18). Christensen further states: “This concern about state agency representation on accrediting bodies continues in the accrediting community to this day” (p. 18).

Failure to achieve recognition from the NCA and the temporary withdrawal of the National Education Association from NCATE in 1972 led to a significant change in NCATE's governance structure (Christensen, 1985). The significant loss of revenue that resulted forced NCATE to change its governance structure in 1974, to that which is still in use (Christensen, 1985). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

(AACTE) now makes up a third of the council membership, another third belongs to the NEA and the remaining third to other organizations. Associate membership was also established during the 1974 reorganization. This category of membership had accrediting decision power, but no policy, budget, procedure, or standards decision power (Christensen, 1985).

One result of NCATE's reorganization was the emphasis placed upon peer review and the role of professional associations in the accreditation process. When NCATE was first established in 1954, the standards it adopted were those used by the forerunner of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). At the time, the general nature of the language used in the accreditation criteria was similar to that of institutional accreditation (Christensen, 1985). Between 1954 and the reorganization of NCATE's governance structure in 1974, AACTE continued to have exclusive authority for evaluation, development and implementation of new standards. In 1974, this role was transferred to the Council. In the 1960s, accreditation criteria were revised to include much more specific language. Some of the most significant changes in NCATE accreditation criteria over the years include increased emphasis and specificity on governance and responding to guidelines of other professional organizations (Christensen, 1985).

In his review of changes that occurred in NCATE's procedures, Christensen (1985) cites those related to site visits as being the most significant.

. . . in 1954, the nature of accreditation was that of an institution demonstrating to a group of peers (defined as persons from similar kinds of institutions) that it was providing effective programs. In contrast, NCATE accreditation is now a process by which an institution demonstrates to a group of peers (now defined as persons from the total teaching profession) that the program the institution offers meets predetermined national standards. (p. 18)

Recognition that practitioners (as well as any other constituent) have a legitimate interest in accreditation reflected the expansion of whom stakeholders of accreditation were considered to be. This shift in philosophy resulted in another NCATE change over the years—an emphasis on site team member training (Christensen, 1985). Finally, the third most significant change in the development of NCATE was the elimination of interim provisional accreditation categories. Rather than providing entities with conditional approval, NCATE adopted the practice of either granting or denying accreditation, with no time for correction of deficiencies (Christensen, 1985).

Accreditation of Funeral Service Education.

Many of the milestones and characteristics associated with the histories of national specialized accrediting bodies are also shared with funeral service education accreditation. Its development illustrates the tri-partite efforts between practitioners, regulators and educators; changes to governance structure as a result of government influence and fundamental principles of accreditation, such as peer review; and the

changing roles of educators, regulators and practitioners over time, in the accreditation/governance process. A close review of the development of accreditation for funeral service education is valuable because of the potential model it provides.

Prior to 1946, there were three organizations that had some relationship to, or interest in, funeral education. These were: the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), a professional association of practitioners; the Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards of the United States (The Conference), organizations which had some responsibility for regulating the industry at the time; and several associations of schools and colleges (educators) concerned with funeral service education (ABFSE, 1989). In 1946, the Joint Committee on Mortuary Education was formed (changed to the American Board of Funeral Service Education in 1959) as a result of joint resolutions passed by The Conference as well as NFDA, with concurrence from the schools. The Joint Committee was composed of three representatives appointed by NFDA, three representatives appointed by The Conference, and three representatives of the schools and colleges (ABFSE, 1993).

During this early organizational design, interests of the regulators in the accreditation process prevailed since the three representatives appointed by The Conference served as the association's accreditation committee. The Joint Committee had authority to make and enforce its own rules and regulations governing its procedure and conduct. It also had the authority to formulate, promulgate and enforce rules and regulations setting up standards concerning the schools and colleges teaching mortuary science. The constitution of the Joint Committee gave The Conference (its three representatives on the Joint Committee) the power to accredit schools and colleges of mortuary science (ABFSE, 1989). The Joint Committee established an Appellate Board that reported to the Joint Committee. Rules and procedures for the Appellate Board were promulgated by the Joint Committee. Schools and colleges of mortuary science had the right to appeal decisions made by The Conference (accreditation committee) to the Appellate Board of the Joint Committee.

In 1962, the authority to accredit funeral service institutions/programs was transferred from The Conference to the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE, 1993). This provided more balanced representation in the accreditation process from practitioners and educators. In keeping with the principle of accreditation by peers, the ABFSE amended its constitution and bylaws in 1970 to provide for the establishment of a Commission on Schools within the framework of a restructured board.

The Commission was charged with the following responsibilities (ABFSE, 1993, p. 3): (a) prepare for, and certify to, the American Board, criteria and procedures for accreditation; (b) receive reports from a Standards and Criteria Committee and to certify to the American Board those schools that met the criteria and were to be accredited; and (c) establish, in cooperation with the American Board, appellate procedures on accreditation certifications of the Commission. Under this system, the American Board accepted the certifications of the Commission and would then make official statements of accreditation.

Finally, in 1978, in reaction to and in accordance with recommendations made by the United States Office of Education, the American Board of Funeral Service Education appointed an ad hoc committee for the purpose of restructuring the board (ABFSE, 1993). At this time, the Commission on Schools was renamed and became an autonomous standing committee of the Board. The resulting relationship between the functions of the board and accreditation is similar to many other national specialized accrediting bodies. Many of these organizations are made up of a board and a separate committee on accreditation that reports to the board.

History of Accreditation for Fire Related Degree Programs

The need for an accreditation system for fire related degree programs was first identified in a special report entitled, *Accreditation in Fire Training and Education*, completed by the Advisory Committee on Fire Training and Education of the National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control (later known as the National Fire Academy) and sent to the administrator of the United States Fire Administration of the United States Department of Commerce in 1979. This report addressed the desirability of, and mechanism for, establishing accreditation procedures for fire-related training and education programs in the United States and examined the appropriate role of the National Fire Academy in such a process.

In its report, a distinction was made between fire service training and fire-related education, treating these two issues separately. Fire service training was defined as “. . . particularly concerned with the development, maintenance, and upgrading of skills, knowledge, and procedures relevant to the operational fire service, whereas fire-related education is more academic in nature and usually leads to a degree” (National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control, 1979, p. x). The report commented on the wide diversity of fire-related degree programs and expressed a concern that student expectations were not being met in some cases. Two important needs were identified: (a) documentation and evaluation of the knowledge required for specific careers in the fire service; and (b) development of minimum criteria in order to evaluate academic programs for the fire service and related professions (National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control, 1979, p. xi). In addition, the need for a specialized program of accreditation oriented to fire-related education programs in fire science, fire technology, and fire administration/management was described. The report stated that such an accreditation system should follow the general pattern of specialized peer group accreditation used by other professional academic programs (National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control, 1979).

Based upon these findings, the following three recommendations regarding fire-related education programs were made (National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control, 1979):

1. An independent organization should be established that is charged with the implementation of a specialized (programmatic) review/evaluation process directed to the accreditation of fire-related education programs with

- professional career objectives in fire science, fire technology, and fire administration and management.
2. The organization should meet the recognition requirements of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) and of HEW's Office of Education, Bureau of Postsecondary Education, Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation.
 3. The National Fire Academy should not undertake, or be involved in, the recommended accreditation program. The Academy, however, should play a lead role in seeking to establish an appropriate accreditation organization, in establishing its charter, in securing financing, and in assisting it through the formative stages of determining an operational format, establishing criteria and standards, and evolving an organizational structure. (p. xii)

First Meeting of Degree Program Representatives: May 1993

Fourteen years following the National Academy Fire Prevention and Control Report, development of an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs began. This initiative was undertaken by the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) which had been established in 1990 and was providing a national accreditation system for National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards-based, noncredit certificate programs. In May 1993, representatives from colleges and universities that offered fire-related degree programs met for the first time. There were several distinguishing characteristics associated with this meeting. First, prior to the meeting, a plan had been developed describing the process to be used for the formation of a new IFSAC assembly made up of representatives of fire-related degree programs and the development of an accreditation system for such programs. This plan did not anticipate the needs of meeting participants, and many issues involving organizational structure and governance were not addressed. Before pursuing the technical aspects of developing an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs, meeting participants needed to ground such a system in a commonly held set of assumptions. Therefore, the original plan was largely ignored and the meeting participants revised the agenda.

In attempting to advance a discussion on specific aspects of accreditation criteria, conference attendees realized they did not know enough about existing fire-related degree programs to identify common practices that could be used as a baseline for establishing standards. They were also unsure of, or could not agree on, the meaning or definition of some of the general categories for which they were supposed to identify possible requirements for accreditation. There were questions as to whether programs not in regionally accredited institutions should be eligible for accreditation, or programs from fields outside, but related to, the fire service industry, such as those focused on emergency medical services or emergency preparedness/management (IFSAC, 1993, May 3-4). There was evidence the groups were overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the task, unsure of their direction and purpose, and in need of first grounding the discussion in a commonly held set of assumptions and beliefs (IFSAC, 1993, May 3-4). There were fundamental questions that needed to be discussed and resolved. For example, was it a commonly held belief that accreditation for fire-related degree programs was needed and would increase

the professionalism of the fire service, and if so, should this activity become part of IFSAC versus some other organization, or even a free-standing initiative? How did the participants feel about the concept in principle that there would be two assemblies within IFSAC and a single board with representatives from each assembly? What should be the mission and goals of the new accreditation system for fire-related degree programs?

In response to the concerns raised, during the meeting four new questions were formulated, answers to which helped articulate IFSAC's objectives for developing an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs (IFSAC, 1993, May 3-4). Responses to the questions were summarized as follows (IFSAC, 1993, May 3-4, pp. 3-4):

- 1. Do we believe accreditation will increase the professionalism of the fire service and why?** Yes. Accreditation will provide: a way to set standards; credibility and validation of educational programs; reliability; self-, peer- and third-party evaluation; professional exchange; academic and career development; reciprocity; transferability; effective preparation of the next generation of fire service leadership; wider recognition of programs within the fire community; the development of a common vocabulary; the possibility of "common curriculum"; clarity of goals (pre-employment; basic steps; promotional opportunities); advancement opportunities for fire fighters; and a means for identifying national trends.

- 2. Do we think a new assembly under IFSAC organization is the proper direction for that accreditation and why?** Yes. Because it is peer driven, it provides a common ground between training and education (unity). IFSAC can: provide terminology definition; allow for continuity and progression; provide guidance and stability; and provide expertise and experience. It is unanimously endorsed; the alternative is status quo; it represents opportunities for transferability; and OSU has the most recognizable credibility for training in the world, so it is the proper home for the Congress.

- 3. Do we endorse, at least at a supportive level, the Board of Governors restructuring the governance structure and taking it to the current Congress for approval and why?** We support the Board of Governors proposing Bylaws amendments and presenting them to the Congress to create a second assembly. We believe those represented here should begin the process of creating a new assembly with guidance of the present BOG. The model shown on the brochure provided to participants seems to be a fair and effective way to proceed.

- 4. What should be the mission and goals of an accreditation system for fire-related degrees?**
Goals identified were to: achieve and maintain a quality system; standardize outcomes and objectives; achieve credibility by design; market fire degree programs to certified personnel; provide a structure for continuing evolution and progressive refinement of the standards by which objectives are assessed; develop, execute, and refine systematic approaches for measurement and recording of program performance in participating institutions; clarify curriculum definitions (different course content with same title); provide curriculum exchange; extend benefits already existent in IFSAC; provide mechanism for transferability and reciprocity; provide international recognition; develop a common core for degrees; assist student in receiving credit for courses; develop and maintain a forum for dialogue between accredited entities; provide equality and consistency; gain acceptance by universities of associate programs within affiliations and disciplines; and increase the professionalism and image of the fire service.

Process for Developing Accreditation Criteria for Fire Related Degree Programs

Early in the development of IFSAC accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs there was discussion regarding the basic philosophical premise on which they would be based. There were generally two opposing views expressed. Some felt accreditation criteria should be prescriptive to the extent of identifying core curriculum and other requirements closely tied to national professional competency standards and task analyses. Others felt the accreditation criteria should only attempt to measure how well a

program was meeting the standards it had set for itself (IFSAC, 1993, October 18-19). There was also considerable discussion regarding the scope of the new accreditation system. For example, it was suggested the Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs for the EMT-Paramedic of the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA), a member of the former Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, might be interested in participating within the new IFSAC accreditation system for fire-related degree programs if the language of the criteria was broad enough in scope to include a curriculum other than fire science (IFSAC, 1993, October 18-19). The IFSAC accreditation system might also include the field of emergency management. At the same time, there was concern that the activities of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) or the American Society of Safety Engineers not be duplicated (IFSAC, 1993, October 18-19).

Those who participated in the development of the IFSAC accreditation system for fire-related degree programs were well aware of the difference between accreditation criteria used by the IFSAC certificate assembly (exclusively outcomes-based, focused entirely on examination processes) and traditional value-added criteria used to accredit programs in higher education (IFSAC, 1993, October 18-19). The new IFSAC fire-related degree accreditation system had an opportunity to become a model in the industry by striking a balance. The problem was that no standard on which to base evaluations of student learning outcomes in an academic program existed. Schools did not know on what to base a test. Because of this, there was some support for the efforts by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) to revive the standard relating to fire science degrees and to identify a core curriculum (IFSAC, 1993, October 18-19).

Discussion on the development of accreditation criteria continued in November 1993 when a small group of college and university representatives from fire-related degree programs met to take action on the proposed IFSAC degree assembly bylaws. Participants recognized that the process used to develop accreditation criteria would be important to lending credibility to the final product. It needed to be well publicized and must solicit participation and input from major stakeholders (IFSAC, 1993, November 7-8). Members of the ad hoc committee who drafted the bylaws for the IFSAC degree assembly remained on the ad hoc committee charged with the responsibility to delineate the process to be used to develop accreditation criteria (IFSAC, 1993, November 7-8). This task included these steps:

1. Lay out a process to draft and/or adopt criteria documents.
2. Describe the level of, and mechanism for, consumer contribution.
3. Define a timetable for progressive steps in this process.

In February 1994, an IFSAC committee designed a process for use in developing accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs. Several existing models used by various industries to develop such things as codes and standards were examined. One of these models was the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) standards-making process. The NFPA process emphasized public comment, opportunities for input, and accountability on the part of those developing the standards, criteria, etc. (IFSAC, 1994,

February 25-26). In the short time that IFSAC had gone public with its intent to develop an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs, representatives of colleges throughout the country had expressed concern over the process to be used (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). Many of these officials were very concerned over what they perceived to be their inability to impact upon the development of accreditation criteria potentially affecting their programs (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). In at least one instance, a community college official responsible for a fire science degree program was under the impression that accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs were already being developed, and, moreover, that these criteria were being developed by individuals with experience only in the delivery of noncredit certificate programs (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). Acknowledging this concern, the following issues and questions were identified and had to be addressed before discussion continued regarding the entire process to be used to develop accreditation criteria (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26):

- Who should be on the committee that's going to develop the accreditation criteria?
- What should be the relationship between the committee developing the accreditation criteria and the future board of the degree assembly (to take place during the April IFSAC conference)?
- How should the committee members be selected who are going to be developing the accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs (taking into consideration different types of representation: institutional, geographical, etc.)?
- What process will be used to select a chair or leader for the committee that will be developing accreditation criteria?

Accreditation Criteria Development Committee.

Several issues were considered regarding the make up of a committee to work on accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs. It was recognized that one factor involved a financial consideration. That is, members of the committee working on accreditation criteria needed to be able to attend several meetings each year. This involved what some colleges would consider to be a significant annual travel expenditure (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). It was acknowledged that if the committee members were to come from the pool of organizations submitting letters of interest in participating in the future IFSAC degree assembly, the pool was exceedingly small (twelve members) at the time (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). It was also recognized that such a committee did not necessarily have to be elected. There were various options considered for appointing members in order to achieve desired representation (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). Disadvantages involved with self-selection based upon the ability to fund travel were considered. This was recognized as one of the weaknesses of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards development process. It was determined that the ideal size of such a committee would be nine to twelve members with a fixed number from the board (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). There was some interest in balancing the committee based

upon geographical representation as well as by institutional type (four-year versus two-year schools). It was believed that involvement of four-year fire-related degree programs in the new accreditation system would facilitate greater opportunities for articulation between two-year and four-year fire-related degree programs (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). The new degree assembly board was given the responsibility to select criteria development committee members based upon these considerations (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26).

Criteria Development Plan.

A plan for the development of accreditation criteria was put together in February 1994. This plan was adapted from the standards-making process used by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and included the following steps (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26):

- A. Criteria development committee develops first public draft of proposed accreditation criteria for fire degree programs.
- B. First public draft of criteria would be sent to all the fire degree programs for public comment.
 1. Individuals have 90 days in which to submit written comments to IFSAC administration.
 2. After 90 days, the criteria development committee meets to consider all comments.
 3. The original comments plus the committee's written response to the comments and any changes (which would result in the development of a second public draft) to the first public draft of the accreditation criteria are sent to all fire degree programs.
 4. No sooner than 60 days following the distribution of the second public draft of the accreditation criteria, the fire degree assembly meets to take action on the proposed accreditation criteria.

It was suggested that criteria development committee meeting locations be rotated geographically, meetings be open to public, and notice of meeting dates and locations be sent to all institutions offering fire degree and certificate programs (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). It was estimated that it could take as long as two years to complete the steps in the plan depending upon the number of public comments received. One of the responsibilities of the degree assembly board was to work with the accreditation criteria development committee to identify a timeline for completing this project (IFSAC, 1994, February, 25-26). It was recognized that the process for adopting degree accreditation criteria needed to be done by a defined body of institutional representatives. Following the strategy used by the certificate assembly, it was suggested those institutions having a letter of interest on file with the IFSAC administrative office would constitute voting members of the assembly until such time as there were sufficient numbers of accredited members so as to warrant accreditation as a prerequisite to membership (IFSAC, 1994, February, 25-26). However, concern was expressed that the proposed plan would give considerable input and influence over the development of the fire-related degree accreditation system to individuals who were not necessarily members of IFSAC and who, therefore, did not have

as much at stake as those who were participants (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26). It was suggested that the process proposed would only have to be used for the express purpose of developing accreditation criteria. Processes to be used for developing other procedures and protocols for the degree assembly could be determined on a case-by-case basis and that this type of decision be left to the degree assembly board (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26).

As the procedure used for the development of accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs was developed, notes were made of suggestions for consideration by the degree assembly regarding actions that would facilitate the accreditation criteria development process. There was discussion regarding the need to communicate and inform stakeholders regarding the activities of IFSAC and the development of a fire-related degree accreditation system so that opportunities for input and participation would be maximized. Several strategies were considered for accomplishing this, to include the use of regular (monthly) newsletters, electronic media (bulletin boards), articles in trade journals, special mailings, etc. (IFSAC, 1994, February 25-26).

Adoption of the Accreditation Criteria Development Process.

In 1994, the newly constituted IFSAC degree assembly reviewed and approved the proposed process for developing accreditation criteria (IFSAC, 1994, April 16-17). The degree assembly also discussed short-range plans, projects needing completion, and timelines for doing so. It was determined the following tasks needed to be completed (IFSAC, 1994, April 16-17):

- Assess the status of current fire-related degree programs.
- Establish common terminology/definitions for use in discussions involving fire-related degree programs.
- Identify minimum and general education requirements common to most fire-related degree programs
- Identify possible outcome measures that could be used for evaluating fire-related degree programs.
- Examine other specialized accreditation systems and identify models for possible use.
- Begin development of accreditation criteria.

Work groups were established to carry out the tasks identified and organized based upon geographic locations and time zones (IFSAC, 1994, April 16-17). The IFSAC administrative office created a database capable of storing and organizing all the information collected so that it could be reviewed by the degree assembly board (IFSAC, 1994, April 16-17). One of the items of most interest to the assembly was identification of course requirements common to fire-related degree programs. This information was collected using a survey distributed by the IFSAC administrative office to all degree-granting institutions known to offer fire-related degrees (IFSAC, 1994, April 16-17). Prior to this survey, the only other survey of this nature was completed in 1975 by the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration (NFPCA) of the United States Department of

Commerce. The survey was an important reference because it contained the only comprehensive listing of fire service related degree programs. It featured information regarding the nature of fire-related degree programs and confirmed the existence of 313 such programs offered by colleges and universities at the time (NFPCA, 1975).

The response to the IFSAC survey was small. By September of 1994, 27 responses from a mailing list of approximately 360 institutions (an approximate return of 7%) known to offer some type of fire-related degree program at the time, were returned (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b). The results of the survey indicated that most institutions were accredited by regional institutional accrediting bodies. Some fire-related programs were within an academic field (other than fire service) accredited by their respective national specialized accrediting body. This raised the possibility that in some isolated cases, conflict could occur between the IFSAC fire-related degree accreditation system and other national specialized accrediting bodies which included fire-related degree programs in their scope of accreditation (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b). Many institutions responding to the survey indicated their respective states required teachers to be certified. It was assumed the requirements for post-secondary instructors could differ greatly between states and existing accrediting organizations which may also provide educational requirements for instructors teaching in post-secondary degree programs (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b).

The results of the IFSAC survey indicated that more needed to be learned regarding the nature of programs awarding credit for work done outside the institution, so that accreditation criteria could address this issue. In addition to this, no clear definition existed distinguishing terms used to describe different types of fire-related degree programs (e.g., fire protection, fire science, fire administration). A wide variety of titles and definitions existed but they often did not accurately describe the various curricula (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b). There was speculation that some of these differences were regionalized. Fire-related degree accreditation criteria needed to address not only core requirements for programs but also support general education requirements, such as English, social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities. It was noted that in many cases, degree programs were subject to external requirements from state and federal agencies. These conditions needed to be considered when developing accreditation criteria. There were situations where internal institutional requirements for graduation included satisfactory completion of coursework, as well as special test requirements for graduation. Regional sampling of institutions offering fire-related degree programs needed to be done in order to complete a more accurate survey (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b).

Classification of Fire Related Degree Curriculum.

One of the early issues with which the degree assembly board struggled in the development of a fire-related degree accreditation system was the classification of fire-related degrees. This was considered to be a necessary first step at the time because the assumption was that there may need to be different accreditation criteria for different types of fire-related degree programs. The degree assembly board reviewed definitions of several types of fire-related degrees from the following sources, such as *Peterson's Guide*

to *Two and Four Year Programs*, *Fire/Emergency Service Source Book*, and *The College Blue Book* (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b). Several approaches and considerations for classifying different type of fire-related degree programs were considered, including student learning outcomes and curriculum content, philosophy and the mission of the institution, and curriculum components essential to different types of fire-related degree programs. Accreditation criteria could then focus more on evaluating support facilities and policies used to administer programs (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b). To address these issues, two work groups were appointed.

The first group attempted to identify various areas of study typical of fire-related degree programs in order to identify their characteristics. Support courses were also included in this review. For example, courses such as calculus, hydraulic engineering and physics were typically part of a curriculum leading to a degree in fire protection engineering or fire protection engineering technology. The work group found courses such as management, accounting, and budgeting were usually part of a curriculum leading to a degree in municipal fire service administration. Degree programs closely allied to the fire service were also noted such as those with an emphasis on emergency medical services (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b).

The second work group that examined accreditation policies applicable to all types of fire degree programs suggested that a policy document be developed similar to the one used by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) containing the following articles (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b): *Scope, Purpose, Responsibilities, Objectives, Development, Description of Programs, Accreditation Policies, Appeal Policies and Procedures, and Public Release Policies*. The work group suggested committees be appointed, each chaired by a board member, to draft language for each of the articles. The intent was to present a draft of the completed document to degree assembly members for their review and action at the spring 1995 IFSAC conference (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b).

The Need for Additional Expertise.

Members of the degree assembly board recognized the need for gaining additional expertise in support of their efforts to develop the new national specialized accreditation system for fire-related degree programs. Most of this interest centered on learning more about institutional practices. It was suggested training be offered as part of the agenda for the degree assembly meeting during the 1995 IFSAC conference. Members of the board expressed an interest in getting more information on the following topics (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b):

- Requirements for accepting transfer credit in United States, as well as international, institutions of higher education.
- Common program accreditation criteria related to procedures for accepting transfer credit in the United States and other countries as well as common problems that should be avoided.
- Current requirements for recognition from the organization that succeeded the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA).
- Development of site team training programs for individuals participating on site visits associated with accreditation of degree granting programs.
- Examples of self-study documents used by academic programs within institutions of higher education to prepare for site visits from national specialized accrediting bodies.

It was also suggested that a speaker be brought in with experience in the development of new national specialized accrediting bodies, who could share those experiences with members of the IFSAC degree assembly with the hope that common mistakes could be avoided and the development process improved and shortened (IFSAC, 1994, September 24-25-b).

Development of Criteria.

It was clear, by September 1994, that the development of accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs was becoming a function of the degree assembly board rather than a separate ad hoc committee reporting to the board. Following the timeline developed during the September 1994 degree assembly board meeting, the first draft of the IFSAC accrediting criteria for fire-related degree programs was completed. The content of this document did not include actual proposed accreditation criteria, but rather described a variety of proposed administrative policies for conducting the business of the degree assembly, borrowing heavily from language used in the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) handbook (Benjamin, 1994, November 16). The distribution of this draft document to members of the degree assembly board elicited several comments from board members who identified issues needing clarification of an editorial, logistical, and/or organizational nature, and also provided an examination of the proposed language against an international perspective. This review process produced

challenges to the concept of the IFSAC inverted governance structure, which vested policy-making authority with the assembly rather than the board. This principle had been the cornerstone of IFSAC's political ideology. The number of degree-granting institutions in the United States offering fire-related degree programs was quite large, and there was potential for additional participation from institutions in other countries. Under such circumstances, there was a question as to whether the executive authority and decision-making powers vested in the degree assembly as proposed was feasible or realistic because decision-making would become ineffective and inefficient. At some point in the future, delegation of these powers to a smaller group of individuals selected democratically by the members of the degree assembly might be necessary (Fenner, 1994, December 1).

The potential for a high volume of accreditation activity at some point in the future of IFSAC and the perspective of international participation in IFSAC also prompted alternatives to the proposed appeals process described in the draft document of the IFSAC degree assembly administrative policies. As the volume of accreditation activity increased, the volume of appeals could also increase proportionately. In the event of an appeal, the proposed language in the draft document called for a special meeting to be held (Benjamin, 1994, November 16, p. 6.) "... at the IFSAC administrative office or other location as soon as practical and convenient to all parties concerned." Travel to the United States from an overseas country for the purpose of attending such meetings was not very cost effective, and alternative means for conducting such meetings, such as computer and video conferencing, needed to be considered (Fenner, 1994, December 1).

In January 1995, the degree assembly board met to continue work underway by the two ad hoc committees. By this time, as a result of various data-gathering activities, the degree assembly board settled on the following standard definitions and nomenclature for describing different types of fire-related degree programs (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15):

- Fire Science: These programs were generally oriented to providing an understanding of the basic sciences relevant to fire fighting, fire protection, and fire prevention.
- Fire Technology: These programs placed a major emphasis on the technical implications of fire fighting, fire protection, and fire prevention.
- Fire Administration: These programs were oriented to the administrative, legal, managerial, and business aspects of the fire service.
- Fire Protection Engineering: These programs were concerned with systems analysis and design related to fire protection systems, equipment, and operations. (It was noted that Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology accreditation was available for these types of programs.)
- Fire Engineering Technology: These types of programs were concerned with the application of technical skills in support of the engineering function.
- Fire/Arson Investigation: These programs were concerned with the detection, investigation, and prosecution of arson-related crimes.

Significant overlap existed between some types of fire-related degree programs, such as Fire Science and Fire Technology. In addition, the degree programs studied were based on the American higher educational system of associate, baccalaureate, and master's degrees. If there were to be international participation in the IFSAC fire-related degree program accreditation system, a matrix of international equivalencies had to be developed (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15). Additional work also needed to be done exploring the nature of fire-related degree programs known by the following titles: Industrial Fire Protection, Occupational Safety and Fire Protection, Emergency and Public Services, Hazardous Materials, and Emergency Management (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15). Rather than studying different types of degree program curricula a basis for accreditation criteria, the other approach considered involved developing criteria common to two-year versus four-year fire-related degree programs or some combination of both dimensions, e.g., type of degree: A.S., B.S., or M.S., and curriculum emphasis. Two-year fire-related degree programs seemed to have more elements in common with each other than four-year and master's programs, which had a tendency to specialize (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15). Some courses were common to many two-year fire-related degree programs (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15).

General education requirements of fire-related degree programs were also examined. Typically these requirements were a function of the respective regional institutional accrediting body under whose jurisdiction the college or university came. The IFSAC degree assembly board ad hoc committee recommended that the general education requirements specified by an institution seeking accreditation be accepted, and only institutions regionally accredited be eligible for IFSAC accreditation. The committee noted, however, that this would not be applicable to degree programs and institutions in other countries. They suggested that institutional approvals performed in many cases by a unit of government could be applied by IFSAC in the same manner (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15).

While the IFSAC degree assembly board did not discuss actual proposed criteria for the accreditation of fire-related degree programs during their January 1995 meeting, they did outline a framework around which criteria would be developed. It was envisioned that these areas would be examined as part of a self-study completed by an institution seeking IFSAC accreditation for its fire-related degree program (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15).

As the degree assembly board reviewed the work accomplished by its two committees, it was determined these committees would remain active in order to continue to carry out their tasks in preparation for the April 1995 IFSAC conference. By then it was hoped the board would be prepared to present draft documents of some of the first sections of the new accreditation criteria (administrative policies) for action by the degree assembly members. Meanwhile, in order to provide opportunities for additional comment and to keep IFSAC degree assembly members updated on the progress being made, the IFSAC administrative office mailed out the preliminary draft documents to institutions known to offer fire-related degree programs (IFSAC, 1995, January 14-15).

Challenges

As the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) began to develop a new accreditation system for fire-related degree programs, the greatest challenge associated with this undertaking was to be able to strike a balance between focusing on outcomes versus the process needed to achieve the desired outcomes. Within this framework were challenges of a political, conceptual, logistical, and organizational nature. The most important developments related to early work on the establishment of a new accreditation system for fire-related degree programs occurred from 1993 through early 1995. During this time two events had significant potential for influencing the nature of this new accreditation system (although it remains uncertain to what extent they did so). One was a workshop on higher education sponsored by the National Fire Academy. The second was discussion regarding the possibility of reactivating the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1461, *Standard for Criteria for Accreditation of Fire Protection Programs*.

In early 1993 a plan was developed for the establishment of a second assembly within IFSAC made up of representatives from colleges and universities offering fire-related degree programs. However, there were weaknesses in the plan, the primary of which was that it represented an unrealistic timeline that failed to take into account changes in the IFSAC governance structure requiring approval from the IFSAC membership. The plan called for two meetings of college and university fire-related degree program representatives in 1993. One of the objectives of the second meeting was to elect eight members from the assembly of fire-related degree programs to the IFSAC board (Walker, 1993, February). However, such a change required an amendment to the IFSAC bylaws and had to be proposed in writing and submitted to the administrative office at least sixty days prior to a regular or special IFSAC meeting (IFSAC, 1993, March). Absent a special meeting of the IFSAC, no changes in the bylaws could be made until its next meeting in August 1994. Moreover, the formation of a second IFSAC assembly made up of representatives from college and university fire-related degree programs itself also required an IFSAC bylaw change. This, too, had to wait until August of 1994. These logistics were overlooked by the plan, and in reviewing the plan prior to its implementation, no one raised these issues. Ultimately, the net effect of this situation was that representatives of fire-related degree programs could conduct no official business as part of IFSAC until significant changes were made in the IFSAC governance documents in 1994.

Higher Education Workshop at the National Fire Academy.

While representatives of fire-related degree programs and members of the IFSAC board began work on documents to establish a second assembly within IFSAC and expand its board with degree program representation, the National Fire Academy (an institute within the Federal Emergency Management Agency that provides noncredit short courses to fire service personnel) sponsored a workshop that brought together representatives from state fire service training agencies and fire-related degree programs. The goal of the workshop was to foster a unified higher education network with state fire service training agencies and two-year academic fire programs which met the needs of the fire service and the National Fire Academy's goals for the year 2000 (National Fire Academy, 1993, August).

One of the primary issues discussed during the workshop was the lack of articulation between state fire service training agencies and local institutions of higher education offering fire-related degree programs (National Fire Academy, 1993, August). The workshop participants identified the following characteristics related to fire service training and education they felt were present at the time (National Fire Academy, 1993, August, p. 2):

- Fire fighters/officers who satisfy the standards for certification want to be awarded appropriate academic credit towards their fire science associate's (or bachelor's) degrees;
- Fire science degree students who are seeking certification want to apply their academic credentials towards satisfaction of the appropriate standards;
- There are uneven levels of curriculum degree planning occurring between associate degree programs, Open Learning institutions and State fire service training; and
- There are many two-year degree programs in need of state and local support (curriculum, recruitment, involvement, etc.) to stay "viable", most two-year degree programs would benefit from a network which promotes the sharing of resources, curriculum and ideas for mutual gain and benefits.

In the view of the workshop participants, what was lacking was a unified, comprehensive national strategy to deal with these issues (National Fire Academy, 1993, August). More coherence within fire service education and training was needed. Workshop participants believed that state fire training agencies should articulate fire service certificate programs with academic credit and that greater collaboration was needed between two-year colleges and state fire training agencies to increase the number of fire fighters participating in their programs (National Fire Academy, 1993, August). What was perhaps most significant was that the National Fire Academy workshop participants also developed a list of qualities they felt best represented a model fire science associate's degree program (National Fire Academy, 1993, August).

These model characteristics were never formally introduced as a basis for the development of IFSAC accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs. However, since some of the participants in the National Fire Academy workshop were also involved in the earliest discussions that established a framework for the content of future IFSAC accreditation criteria, the work done at the National Fire Academy may have had an influence.

National Fire Protection Association Standard 1461.

The second significant development during the summer of 1993 with a potential for impacting upon the IFSAC accreditation initiative involved the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The NFPA is a nonprofit voluntary membership organization dedicated to fire protection and prevention. Through the use of technical committees, the NFPA develops national consensus standards that describe accepted industry practices for a variety of fire-protection-related activities. One such standard, NFPA 1461, *Standard for Criteria for Accreditation of Fire Protection Programs*, was adopted in 1986 with the hope it would help managers of fire-related degree programs to improve their programs and eventually seek accreditation through an independent accrediting agency (NFPA, 1986). It was intended NFPA standard 1461 be used by accrediting bodies called upon by an institution of higher learning to evaluate and accredit its fire protection education program, except those in fire protection engineering and engineering technology, already accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (NFPA, 1986).

In order to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard 1461, organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs had to demonstrate that their accreditation process promoted and advanced all phases of fire protection education with a view to the promotion of the public welfare through the development of better- educated professionals (NFPA, 1986). An appendix to the standard was written describing the need for accreditation, its meaning and benefits; the accreditation process; standards and criteria on which accreditation is based; the preparation of self-studies; conducting on-site evaluations; the mechanism of the final accreditation decision process; the period of accreditation and reevaluation; and publication of lists of accredited institutions.

The standard established operating assumptions for organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs. First, the standard made it clear its intent was to provide structure for the development of policies related to the accreditation of educational programs rather than institutions. Fire related degree programs seeking accreditation had to belong to institutions accredited by their respective regional institutional accrediting agency or association (NFPA, 1986). The standard also specified that organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs evaluate programs at either the associate's or baccalaureate level, not the degree itself, because the degree designation was considered the prerogative of the institution (NFPA, 1986). The NFPA standard 1461 specified organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs be autonomous and have an "arms-length" relationship to academic institutions, professional societies, educational

organizations, or publishers of educational literature. The standard also stipulated organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs be recognized by the Department of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) (NFPA, 1986). Assuming the authors of the standard intended professional societies to include professional associations, almost all of the specialized accrediting bodies recognized by COPA at the time would not have been able to meet this provision of the standard. Further, the language in the standard prohibiting affiliation with an academic institution and, even more specifically, affiliation with publishers of educational materials, clearly applied to organizations such as IFSAC.

The National Fire Protection Association standard 1461 required accrediting organizations to be evaluated on the basis of self-study data submitted by the institution, together with a supplemental report of an evaluation visit by a carefully selected visitation team. The standard provided criteria for evaluation and a set of self-study questions an accrediting body could use to assess its strengths and weaknesses (NFPA, 1986).

The standard went well beyond identifying the operating parameters for organizations accrediting fire-related degree programs. A significant portion actually specified the criteria to be used by an accrediting body in its evaluation of fire-related degree programs. Accrediting bodies were required to evaluate the extent to which the curriculum of a fire-related degree program developed the abilities of its students to apply pertinent knowledge of fire-related professions in an effective and professional manner (NFPA, 1986). The intent of the NFPA 1461 standard was that this objective be met by a curriculum that included a progression in the course work and in which fundamental scientific and general education of the earlier years was given application in later fire protection courses (NFPA, 1986). In addition to its focus on curriculum, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1461 standard also addressed the nature of faculty involved with the delivery of fire-related degree programs, and the commitment, attitudes, quality of leadership, and policies at all levels of administration in institutions seeking accreditation for their fire-related degree programs (NFPA, 1986).

There is some evidence to suggest NFPA standard 1461 was not widely used, and it was deactivated in 1992 (Smoke, 1993). Because NFPA standards (although voluntary) are recognized as accepted industry practice, it would have been difficult for IFSAC to ignore NFPA standard 1461 during the development of an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs. It is likely had NFPA standard 1461 still been in use in 1993, it would have had a profound influence on the development of the IFSAC accreditation system for fire-related degree programs.

In September 1993, the Fire Science and Technology Educator's section of the National Fire Protection Association met to discuss reactivation of the standard 1461, accreditation criteria and the establishment of core standardized curriculum for fire-related degree programs. An IFSAC official attended this meeting and described the efforts underway to develop an accreditation system for fire-related degree programs. There was some discussion regarding what appeared to be "parallel" efforts between the IFSAC

initiative and the renewed interest in the NFPA 1461 standard (Westhoff, October 1, 1993).

The potential impact resulting from the reactivation of NFPA standard 1461 ranged from effectively co-opting accreditation criteria developed by IFSAC for fire-related degree programs to assisting IFSAC with the development of its accreditation system by providing standards against which IFSAC could develop criteria designed to measure how well organizations met the standards. This would be similar to the symbiotic relationship that existed between the NFPA standards for fire service professional qualifications and IFSAC accreditation criteria for noncredit/certificate programs. If, however, all or some of a reactivated NFPA standard and IFSAC accreditation criteria for fire-related degree programs overlapped in scope (both identifying competing criteria), this would result in considerable confusion and concern. Further, there was no formal plan for linking or coordinating the efforts of NFPA and IFSAC regarding these issues.

Current Issues in Accreditation

There has long been criticism and concern over accreditation in the United States. Some of the argument has its basis in the constant struggle between the need for rigor, standardization and quality assurance, versus the need for flexibility, innovation and diversity. At times these can be countervailing interests. Other concerns regarding accreditation are more straightforward. Specifically, one topic of relevance to emergency management that represents much attention in accreditation is that of distance learning (i.e., online, compressed video, etc.) As distance education and use of the Internet becomes more prevalent, many are asking how accrediting bodies are going to provide for quality assurance? How will accrediting bodies take into account the effect that distance education has on student life and the roles of professors when evaluating the quality of education in the courses (Chronicle, 1998, May 15)? Further, providers of distance education internationally seem to fall into an accreditation “no man’s land” because while there is an organization that specifically accredits distance learning, it does not accredit international educational institutions (Chronicle, 1998, January 30). However, the U.S. Education Department has recently indicated a willingness to discuss conditions under which students in distance learning programs would be eligible for federal financial aid (Chronicle, 1998, December 10). Thus, as it relates to institutions that plan to seek accreditation of their emergency management programs, to the extent that distance learning is employed in the delivery of these programs, the criteria used to accredit such programs is currently evolving, dynamic and still in its developmental infancy. Institutions will need to work closely and communicate regularly with its accreditation provider(s) to ensure that necessary steps are taken to achieve and maintain compliance with related accreditation criteria.

Another current issue in accreditation is the need to emphasize student learning outcomes, efficient use of resources, and heightened accountability. In 1997, the United States House of Representatives’ Committee on Education in the Workforce appointed an 11 member group to prepare a report on the cost of higher education. This report was approved by Congress in January 1998. One of the sections in the report addresses the topic of accreditation. Clearly, the theme to the section of the report was that accreditors

should focus on student learning outcomes, efficient use of resources, and accountability. The following passage provides rationale and detail to this theme as well as implementing recommendations: (U.S. House of Representatives, 1997):

The Commission recognizes and encourages the movement underway at all six regional accrediting associations to focus more on assessing student achievement. Accreditation bodies-both regional and specialized-have been inclined to emphasize traditional resource measures as proxies for quality. Such traditional measures are often difficult to link to demonstrated student achievement. Specialized or professional accreditation has, for the most part, continued to focus on resource measures in making judgments about quality. In fact, to many campus observers, they appear often to be acting more in the economic interest of the professors they represent than in the interest of student achievement. Moreover, specialized accreditation has, in the eyes of many, taken on a life of its own. It has become too complicated, occurs too often, and makes the case for additional resources to support programs of interest to them without regard to the impact on the welfare of the entire institution.

Given the current attention to these issues, institutions should expect to see these reflected in accreditation criteria regardless of the organization from which it seeks accreditation and preparations should be made accordingly.

Summary/Conclusion

Accreditation in the United States is a voluntary, nongovernmental activity performed by associations that recognize educational institutions and programs within institutions (COPA, 1990). Specialized postsecondary accreditation in the United States is typically carried out by national or international professional associations (COPA, 1990). Many professional associations, such as the American Medical Association, existed prior to their involvement in accreditation activities.

While the individual histories of specialized accrediting bodies are shaded in different ways, societal expectations, economic conditions, technological advances, and federalism represent the canvas on which they are all painted. Given this broad context, the collective literature related to the histories of national specialized accrediting bodies can be refined to provide models for the development of a specialized accreditation system for emergency preparedness degree programs.

For many professional associations such as the American College of Surgeons, the American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges, a particular event or milestone in the organization's history acted as the catalyst for the development of accreditation. In some cases, these were external influences such as the threat of encroachment or other actions from the federal government, national emergencies such as war, or damaging public revelations (Averill, 1982; Kassebaum, 1992). For some professional associations, accreditation activities had their origin as program review and approval for membership purposes (Christensen, 1985). The adoption of mandatory continuing education laws in Florida and Kansas represented important milestones in the development of accreditation for continuing pharmaceutical education (Hodapp, 1988).

Another example of a major event or milestone in the historical development of an accrediting body was the withdrawal of the National Education Association from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 1972 (Christensen, 1985). This action resulted in significant changes to the governance structure of the NCATE. Finally, a report of the Carnegie Commission in 1923 was a major milestone in the development of an accreditation system for library education because it led to the formation of a board that developed the first set of standards to be used for evaluating programs (Kimmel, 1987).

The history and development of many associations conducting specialized accreditation include changes to policies, programs, and governance structure, which occurred for a variety of reasons. Some changes resulted from reorganizations and/or consolidations of two or more preceding organizations with an interest in a particular discipline. As in the case of accreditation of funeral service education, many times change involved associations representing practitioners merging or forming a partnership with associations representing regulators and educators/schools (American Board of Funeral Service Education, 1993). The historical development of organizations that accredit medical degrees, continuing pharmaceutical education, teacher education, and hospitals, all experienced a similar evolution (Averill, 1982; Christensen, 1985; Hodapp, 1988; Kassebaum, 1992).

The history of some specialized accrediting bodies also included changes in the nature of accreditation criteria, accreditation status, and definitions of membership. As in the case of the NCATE and accreditation of library education, accreditation criteria experienced changes in emphasis from the use of quantitative to qualitative language and from institutional-type criteria to more program specific criteria (Christensen, 1985; Kimmel, 1987). The history of organizations such as the NCATE also included changes in membership eligibility like that which occurred in 1974 when associate memberships were introduced (Christensen, 1985). This change came as a result of a restructuring of the NCATE and provided associate members accrediting decision powers, but no policy, budget, procedure, or standards decision power. Some specialized accrediting bodies have also experienced changes to their operational practices, such as those involving provisions of conditional approval for accreditation. While some organizations have evolved from the practice of granting or denying accreditation (with no time for correction of deficiencies) to establishing interim categories of conditional approval, other organizations, such as NCATE have moved in the opposite direction (Christensen, 1985).

In some cases, changes occurred regarding the manner in which national professional organizations are organized in relation to their accrediting activities. The history and development of most specialized accrediting bodies resulted in organizational structures, such as the American Board of Funeral Education (1993), where accreditation activities are performed by a subunit (committee) within the organization reporting to the executive or governing board. In other situations accreditation is performed as a result of a standing liaison (committee/commission) that exists between two or more autonomous, or semi-autonomous organizations (particularly if consolidation was not full-function and the effort more closely resembles a consortium). Such efforts involved fusing separate

interests towards common goals. An example of this was the merger of the American Medical Association with the Association of American Medical Colleges in 1942 to form the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (Kassebaum, 1992).

Organizations that administer specialized accreditation have experienced common challenges as well as those unique to their respective organizations. For example, interagency arrangements have posed unique challenges impacting upon the governance, nature of interactions and decision-making processes of accrediting bodies (Averill, 1982). In some fields such as ambulatory health care and the fire service, decisions made during the evolution of specialized accreditation resulted in competing accreditation systems on a national level (Averill, 1982, Walker, 1998). Attempts to establish a greater emphasis on outcomes based learning measures represent another challenge faced by many specialized accrediting bodies (Walker, Westhoff, 1993, January). A major challenge faced by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCATE) came when recognition from the National Commission on Accrediting was denied because state agencies were found to be over represented in the NCATE (Christensen, 1985).

Because the development of emergency management as an academic discipline is in its formative stage, leaders in this industry have a unique opportunity not only to build and strengthen existing degree programs, but also to simultaneously provide a sound basis for these programs which will earn them the public's trust. This can be achieved through specialized accreditation.

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