



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

June 19, 2019

Michelle Edwards, President
Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
750 First Street, NE, Suite 980
Washington, DC 20002
Via email: medwards@acics.org

Dear Ms. Edwards:

The Accreditation Group in the Office of Postsecondary Education received information in a June 4, 2019 article in *Inside Higher ED* and a June 5, 2019 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* regarding Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS or the agency) and its public testimony to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's recognition committee. The articles are enclosed to this letter.

The articles include statements that ACICS has encountered financial difficulty which could affect its ability to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. Specifically, the articles state that ACICS expects a loss of \$2.1 million this year and does not expect to break-even until 2023 at the earliest. In addition, the articles state that the agency has taken cost-cutting measures, to include a reduction in staff, which could affect the agency's administrative capacity to fulfill its accreditation activities.

The article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* also includes information that ACICS accredited an institution, Virginia International University, that is alleged, by a State agency, to have committed plagiarism, grade inflation, and other academic concerns. The same article states that the San Diego University for Integrative Studies is seeking accreditation from ACICS, which is confirmed on the agency's website. Department staff note that the San Diego University for Integrative Studies is currently appealing a denial of reaccreditation decision by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education & Training (ACCET).

The Secretary's recognition of an accrediting agency attests that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of education or training offered by the institutions or programs it accredits. As ACICS is recognized by the Secretary of Education, the information in these articles about the agency's ability to meet its accrediting responsibilities and therefore Federal regulations are taken seriously. Therefore, I am requesting that ACICS provide a full and documented response to me by July 26, 2019. This response must include:

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- the agency's audited financial statements for fiscal years 2017 and 2018;
- the agency's current budget and projections through 2023;
- the agency's directory of accredited institutions;
- a list of the agency's schedule of accreditation reviews (site visits, commission meetings, etc.) and an indication of any that have deferred or moved and the reason for the change;
- the agency's staff directory, to include major job responsibilities for each employee;
- the agency's accreditation actions on and significant correspondence to Virginia International University, to include any inquiry into the allegations by the State;
- any correspondence between ACICS and the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia regarding Virginia International University;
- the agency's accreditation actions on and significant correspondence to San Diego University for Integrative Studies, to include the institution's application for accreditation;
- any correspondence between ACICS and ACCET regarding San Diego University for Integrative Studies;
- a narrative response concerning the information included in the articles and the agency's compliance with Federal regulations in related areas.

The analyst assigned to your agency is Ms. Elizabeth Daggett. Please send the information requested to her via email at elizabeth.daggett@ed.gov. If you have any questions regarding this letter's content or requests, please contact Ms. Daggett by phone at 202-453-6190 or email.

Thank you for your prompt response to the requests for information made in this letter.

Sincerely,

(b)(4); (b)(5)

Herman Bounds Jr., Ed.S
Director, Accreditation Group

Enclosures