

# FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A SINGLE ACCREDITING BODY FOR AUDIOLOGY

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The following outline provides the basic tenets of a proposal made on September 29, 2006 at a meeting called by the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CAPCSD) and attended by representatives of the American Academy of Audiology (AAA), the Accrediting Commission for Audiology Education (ACAE), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA). The purpose of the meeting was to continue discussions regarding the concerns of the CAPCSD for the development of a second accrediting agency for academic programs in audiology. The CAPCSD has requested that the professional organizations (AAA and ASHA) along with the accrediting agencies (ACAE and CAA) discuss the possibility of the formation of single accrediting agency.

Various proposals for a unified agency have been discussed by the participants of the meetings. The following outlines the key elements of the proposal of September 29, 2006. Members of the CAA and ACAE Boards have identified issues that would need to be addressed by the professional organizations and accrediting body in order to accept and implement the proposal. Elements of the proposal are presented in normal type and issues identified by this discussion group are identified in italics. The members of this discussion group did not attempt to determine which elements may or may not be acceptable to either the professional organizations or the accrediting bodies. Also, individual members of this discussion group do not necessarily endorse every element and issue in this document. There may well be additional issues that have not been anticipated.

If the participating organizations wish to move forward with this concept, a plan to appoint and fund a working group should be implemented as soon as possible, as many of the topics identified in this document will require considerable study and development before a comprehensive proposal can be completed.

For the purposes of this document, the “Audiology Division” refers to the accrediting body for audiology programs and “Speech Language Pathology Division” refers to the accrediting body for speech language pathology programs.

## **Element 1: Modification of the Structure of the CAA**

- The current structure of the CAA will be reorganized to separate the audiology and speech-language pathology functions. While the CAA will remain as a title of the agency, the audiology and speech-language pathology boards will be separated into independent bodies. The Audiology Division of the CAA will be solely responsible for the development of standards, the accreditation process, and decisions regarding accreditation status of academic programs in audiology. Similarly, the Speech-Language Pathology Division of the CAA will be solely responsible for academic programs in Speech-Language Pathology.

- There will be no governing body or other such umbrella organization above the Audiology Division or Speech-Language Pathology Divisions.
- A conference group with representatives of the Audiology Division and Speech Language Pathology Division will coordinate administrative functions relative to assuring commonality of forms, site visits, etc. The conference committee will not have the power to coordinate standards or decisions of the separate Divisions.
- The reorganized CAA will seek recognition from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as an independent agency accrediting audiology entry-level graduate programs in the Audiology Division and speech-language pathology entry-level graduate programs in the SLP Division.

*Issue: Are these entities actually separate if joined under the CAA banner, particularly as related to recognition by the ED or CHEA?*

*Issue: Would the ED recognize separate entities under the CAA banner?*

*Issue: ED and CHEA requirements must be satisfied and the recognition process could be lengthy.*

*Issue: Should the entry-level graduate degree be restricted to the AuD or would other doctoral designators be acceptable?*

*Issue: The cost of developing the new two-division CAA and the ongoing costs of the CAA must be determined as closely as possible so that the participating organizations and the accredited programs will have a full understanding of their likely financial commitment when they consider the proposed merger.*

- At such time that the re-organization is complete, the ACAE will be dissolved.

## **Element 2: Relationship of New Accrediting Agency to Professional Organizations**

- The Board of the Audiology Division of the CAA will be composed of individuals selected by appropriate professional organizations.

*Issue: What role, if any, should the ADA or other so-called “niche” organizations play in the new accrediting body?*

*Issue: How many individuals should be on the new accrediting board? How should the individuals be selected?*

*Issue: Is representation on the board tied to financial support of the professional organizations? Should CAPCSD be required to financially support the new accrediting body if they desire representation on the board?*

*The following representation (in addition to the ex officios and public member) was proposed in an early meeting and is not considered to be part of the current proposal but is presented as an example of representation:*

- CAPCSD will select 2 academic members to serve on the Audiology Division of the CAA.

- ASHA will select 2 academic and 2 practitioner members to serve on the Audiology Division of the CAA
- AAA will select 2 academic and 2 practitioner members to serve on the Audiology Division of the CAA
- The individuals selected should be based on their qualifications and commitment to accreditation. They should not be considered to “represent” the respective organizations. An accrediting agency must be capable of making independent decisions and, thus, the concept of “representing” a professional organization would create the perception of undue influence.
- Academic representatives to the Audiology Division must be from accredited audiology programs.

*Issue: Should all representatives, except the public member(s), be audiologists? Should all academic representatives be from academic programs offering the AuD degree?*

### **Element #3: Merger of Accreditation Processes and Standards of CAA and ACAE**

- The Audiology Division of the CAA (or the preliminary working group) will review the accreditation processes (including submission format, verification and site visit process, determination of accreditation status, appeals process, etc.) and standards developed by the ACAE and the CAA and determine the ‘best fit’ for a consolidated accreditation process.

*Issue: The required peer review to develop new/merged standards is a lengthy process, governed by many regulations. Current CAA and ACAE accreditation processes must continue as planning for the new process moves forward.*

*Issue: Financial considerations, including those pertaining to ACAE and ASHA investments in technology and software to date, will be important elements to be considered in determining the feasibility of the merger. Both groups have invested significantly in the development of the accreditation process. Is there a willingness to further invest to merge the processes?*

*Issue: Merger of the accreditation processes would be time consuming and lengthy. Cost estimates for this process would need to be developed.*

- The Audiology Division of the CAA will acquire the Web-based Computerized Accreditation Program (CAP) developed by the ACAE as a basis for the accreditation process.

*Issue: CAA and ASHA have invested in the Higher Education Database System (HES). ACAE and AAA have invested in the CAP. What would be the cost, both actual and potential, to have the CAP adopted as the basis for the accreditation process? The HES and CAP are different systems. The evaluation for utilization of the systems would be costly. Cost estimates, both time and financially, would have to be developed.*

*Issue: Would AAA require financial compensation for the CAP? Would ASHA require financial compensation for the HES?*

- The Speech-Language Pathology Division may seek to acquire the Computerized Accreditation Program as the basis for the accreditation process of programs in speech-language pathology. The process would have to be adapted to meet the standards of the Speech-Language Pathology Division.

*Issue: Would adoption of the CAP program by the reorganized CAA necessitate the Speech Language Pathology Division also adopting this method? Would having two different systems be a burden to academic programs?*

*Issue: The CAP was developed for audiology programs. The CAP would have to be revised for Speech Language Pathology programs. What are the costs associated with such a revision? Would the re-organized CAA be willing and/or able to invest in the system? (This assumes that audiology, via AAA, would not be an investment partner in this regard.)*

- The ACAE and CAA must continue to provide accreditation services to their respective academic programs until such time as a reorganization is finalized.

*Issue: During the transition period, the ongoing work of the CAA and the ACAE will need to continue, plus there will be new expenses associated with the transition. How will those additional transition costs be covered?*

- The AAA, ASHA, and CAPCSD will each provide financial support for the Audiology Division of the CAA.
- The amount of financial support should not be related to the number of representatives on the new board. This further removes the specter of undue influence from the professional organizations.
- The AAA, ASHA, CAPCSD, and other participating organizations, if any, will each provide financial support for the Audiology Division of the CAA. The amount of financial support provided by each organization will require ongoing discussion.

*Issue: The amount of financial support provided by each organization must be determined. The relationship of this financial support to participation in other aspects of the process (e.g., board representation) will require discussion.*

*Issue: Should each organization support the expenses of their respective members of the Audiology Division of the CAA as they carry out their duties?*

*Issue: How can we ensure that financial contribution is not tied to influence in the accreditation process?*

#### **Element #4: Relationship to Certification**

- No standards, guidelines, or requirements should be included that tie the accreditation of programs to the certification requirements of any professional organization.

*Issue: Current accreditation standards by either CAA or ACAE do not reference certification standards; however, the certification entities of ASHA and AAA could be required to remove any language that impose additional academic standards over and above those of the reorganized CAA.*

We hope that this “white paper” reflects the issues and concerns that will need to be contemplated by all the organizations involved as they determine whether to go forward with a merger, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide insight into this important venture.