

## Accreditation – Students File Lawsuit Against University

### Avoiding Liability Bulletin - April 2013

...Universities and colleges throughout the country, and programs within these institutions, seek accreditation or other approval from accrediting or like agencies for multiple purposes, but primarily to establish the bona fides of the institution or program in the milieu that they operate within. CACREP – the [Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs](#) – is an accrediting agency that evaluates professional preparation programs within institutions of higher learning, such as school counselor master’s programs leading to state licensure as a professional counselor. CACREP was established in 1981 upon the approval of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, a precursor to the American Counseling Association.

It was recently reported by the Chicago Tribune (online) that some students attending the Concordia University Chicago master’s degree program in school counseling are suing the school because of the school’s decision that the school counseling master’s program would no longer be accredited by CACREP. Among the allegations being made is that the school advertised to prospective students (and these students in particular, who are scheduled to graduate in May), that the program was accredited by CACREP, and that the CACREP accreditation was an important factor for those pursuing licensure as a professional counselor or seeking employment in a school district after graduation. The suit alleges that the school has broken its promise to the students regarding accreditation and that this constitutes consumer fraud.

The students apparently expected that they would graduate from an accredited program, and they were informed by the school of the importance of accreditation by CACREP. With the announcement of the school’s intent to abandon accreditation by CACREP, that expectation was jeopardized or eliminated. The students, according to the article, are asking for damages in the form of reimbursement for their tuition costs as well as damages for the devalued degrees. It was reported that the school decided not to pursue an extension of accreditation because of financial burdens and new accreditation requirements. It was also reported that the school sought to protect students by requesting that graduates in 2013 and 2014 be “grandfathered” by CACREP – that is, that they be considered to have graduated from an accredited program. Apparently, CACREP denied the request for “grand-parenting.”

I do not know all of the arguments that the University has in its defense, or whether the process they utilized was appropriate under the circumstances. I do know that whenever the law is proposed to be changed in a given state regarding, for example, the educational requirements for licensure, I have advocated that students already in the pipeline be protected by the legislation. In other words, the new requirements should affect only those who will thereafter enter the degree program, but for those who entered the program under specified requirements, they should be protected. The rules of the game should not change during the game. I wonder whether the desire to abandon accreditation for this program, which had been in existence for many years, could have

been accomplished in a manner that would have protected those in the pipeline.

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