

CEA's evolution

The USA's accrediting body for the English language teaching industry is continuing to expand its reach and develop its reputation, with 25 institutions now fully accredited and a further 69 institutions at various stages in the accreditation process. The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) Executive Director, TERESA O' DONNELL, answers our questions about CEA in the US marketplace.

Fact box

	Full name: Commission on English Language Program Accreditation	Association's main role: accreditation of US English language programmes and institutions
	Year established: 1999	Code of practice: yes
	No. of members: 25 members of Constituent Council as of July 2001	Agent workshops and fam trips: no
	Government recognition: CEA is in the process of seeking recognition by the US Department of Education	Complaints procedure: yes, includes a review of accreditation decision by an independent body
	Type of members: accredited English language programmes and institutions in the USA	Association contact details: Commission on English Program Accreditation, 1725 Duke St, Suite 500, Alexandria, VA, 22314, USA. Tel: +1 703 518 2480; Fax: +1 703 518 2535; Email: info@cea-accredit.org
	Membership criteria: accreditation	

Q Since the CEA's incorporation in 1999, what has it achieved?

A CEA has pursued its mission to ensure the quality of English language programmes and institutions in the United States. To date, the commission has accredited 25 programmes and institutions. It has also made decisions to improve CEA policies and procedures, and to ensure the continuing development of CEA as a viable specialised accrediting agency.

Q How many programmes are now accredited in the USA and how many other institutions have expressed an interest in gaining accreditation?

A Twenty-five programmes/institutions are now accredited by CEA. Nine site visits are scheduled [to take place by the end of 2001], and an additional 60 sites are at some stage of the accreditation process. A complete list of the accredited schools can be found on the CEA website at www.cea-accredit.org.

Q What do you believe CEA accreditation means for institutions?

A During the self-study process, a site evaluates its activities and procedures in relation to the nationally accepted CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions. For each standard, the self-study report describes how the site meets the standard... and provides a timeline for improvement. The pride that comes from having completed a successful self-study in itself has benefits, as does feedback from the peer review process. Accreditation means public recognition and guarantees to students and their sponsors that a programme or institution provides a quality

education experience. This can be used to a site's advantage [and incorporated] in its marketing materials.

Q What feedback has been received from overseas agents and consultants about the CEA accreditation process?

A CEA policy requires that all accreditation decisions be announced to [interested parties] and to the public. [We] inform overseas agents and consultants of accreditation decisions each time the commission meets and also list accredited [institutions] on the CEA website. CEA has developed a list of overseas agents based on a publication of the US College Board, which lists overseas international education advisers.

Q Could you briefly explain what the accreditation process entails?

A Programmes and institutions must first meet eligibility requirements. They must offer a minimum of 18 hours' instruction per week for at least eight months per year, have a curriculum designed to serve the needs of post-secondary level students who are non-native English speakers, and offer instruction in the USA. Using the CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions, a site's programmes and services are evaluated through a review process that involves a comprehensive self-study taking up to 18 months to complete; a written report that addresses the 52 standards in the 10 standard areas; review of the report and an on-site visit by a trained peer review team; a review team report; and review and decision by the CEA Commission.

Q Do you work with Accet in any way and how does CEA accreditation differ from Accet accreditation?

A CEA and Accet are separate accrediting agencies with different scopes of accreditation. CEA accredits post-secondary intensive English programmes in universities, colleges and community colleges, as well as stand-alone, proprietary language institutions whose primary focus is English language instruction. Accet is an institutional accreditor of institutions that provide non-collegiate continuing education and training programmes. Accet has [helped] CEA by providing copies of some accreditation materials and inviting CEA staff to attend a meeting of its Council.

Q Do you work with relevant US government departments at all?

A CEA is seeking recognition by the US Department of Education (USDE), so policies and procedures have been developed in accordance with USDE regulations for recognised accrediting agencies. Regulations of the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) require independent language schools to be accredited by an accrediting agency recognised by the USDE. The INS certifies these schools to issue the Form I-20, which students need in order to obtain a student visa to enter the USA.

Q What are the CEA's future aims?

A [We] hope that CEA accreditation will gain recognition throughout the world as a means for students to identify appropriate settings for learning English to meet their academic, professional, or other goals.