

**Remarks of Congressman Bobby Scott
Accreditation Full Committee Hearing
April 27, 2017**

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairwoman Foxx for calling this hearing and I'd like to thank our distinguished witnesses for being here today.

The issue of quality in higher education is one that we address often here in Congress. The higher education system in the United States is one of, if not the best in the world, and we frequently spend our time debating how to increase access to the system or how to make college more affordable. And while these are topics that I'm sure we will continue debating, it is important that we take a step back and determine if we are ensuring that our higher education system maintains its high level of quality across all sectors for all students.

While the federal government and state authorizers both have important roles to play in assuring quality, accrediting bodies are the true arbiters of quality in our higher education system. Their thoughtful peer review process is designed to ensure that institutions are living up

to their educational mission—whether it’s providing students with an education that will be the basis for a lifetime of learning or preparing them to excel in a specific field or career. The title of this hearing alludes to the fact that while students depend on accreditors, taxpayers do as well. Over \$150 billion in federal student aid is disbursed every year, and it can only go to institutions of higher education that have been accredited by a federally recognized accreditor. As such, there are huge fiscal implications to the quality and rigor of accreditation reviews.

While the accreditation systems works well for many schools, it must be improved. We know that there were schools that were fully accredited up until the point that they closed their doors, leaving students out in the cold and taxpayers holding the bag. We also know there are schools that remain accredited while offering their students little chance to obtain a degree, or a credential that has little value in the marketplace. There is emerging research that shows in the worst cases, the outcomes at some fully accredited schools are so poor that students would have been better off going to no school rather than attending.

The federal government has begun to respond to these problems in accreditation. Over the last two years the Department of Education proposed actions to make the accreditation system more transparent, and provide more information on the standards that accreditors use to rate schools. Last year the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, (or NACIQI) derecognized the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (or ACICS), putting other accreditors on notice that subpar standards and a documented history of turning a blind eye to bad actors would not be tolerated.

It seems like many accreditors got the message, and we have seen proposed reforms from accreditors based on recommendations from the previous administration. I know accreditors want to improve and they want to ensure that their members are still providing a top-notch education. But we are at a crossroads. There is no guarantee that the new Administration is going to take as critical a view on the need to improve accreditation, and I worry that the improvements that we've seen of late could falter without the oversight of the federal government.

Accreditation can be a peer-based program designed to foster self-improvement **and** be responsive to data on student outcomes. It can meet the needs of vastly different institutions **but** still use common terms and actions. It can respect the internal decisions and choices of an institution **and** still be transparent. We can have the best accreditation system in the world for the best higher education system in the world, and hopefully our witnesses here today will provide perspective on how we can do just that. Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.