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## BACKGROUND ON THE REVISED HAPS CREDENTIALING STATEMENT July, 2013

In summer 2012, some postings to the HAPS listserv revealed that there were two schools, both community colleges accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), where faculty were being released as unqualified to teach a subject because their graduate degree program was not identical to the course they were teaching. The HAPS President and Board of Directors had previously tackled this problem head-on and issued a position paper on faculty credentialing in 2005. Although SACS revised its faculty credentialing guidelines in response to the 2005 HAPS position paper and put the responsibility for faculty certification in the hands of the schools being accredited, it seemed that problems were persisting.

To determine if the problems described in the listserv postings were isolated or indicative of something broader, I sent requests to several listserves, including the BIOLAB list and the American Physiological Society's (APS) Teaching Section list, asking for additional documentation of examples where problems had occurred. There was enough of a response that the HAPS Board decided to see if a coordinated multi-society effort could be launched.

I then communicated with the APS Executive Committee and Executive Director to alert them that this was a recurring problem and that we were starting to organize a response. Dr. Martin Frank, the APS Executive Director, sent emails to the executive directors of the other FASEB societies. Their responses indicated that from their societies' perspectives, the problem was more concentrated in the community colleges and thus not of great concern to most of their members.

The request for stories of problems generated a significant number of responses. At that point I contacted Susan Musante, Education Programs Manager, at the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) to see if AIBS might be interested in collaborating. Although the credentialing issues are concentrated in combined anatomy and physiology classes because there are almost no graduate programs in combined A&P, faculty teaching in other areas of biology have also encountered problems. Faculty with degrees in botany seem to have the most difficulty being certified, aside from people teaching A&P.

As part of the effort to resolve the A&P credentialing problem, I also contacted Dr. Belle Wheelan, President of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. In response to the first HAPS position paper, SACS had revised its faculty credentialing guidelines to put the responsibility for faculty certification in the hands of the schools being accredited. Based on examples we heard about, the revision to the SACS

guidelines worked well at larger institutions but had not been as successful at community colleges and smaller state schools.

The problems now seem to arise in two places: from administrators who do not understand the scope of the life sciences and want to “play it safe” by requiring that all faculty hold degrees in the subjects they teach, and from SACS visiting committees. In many of the examples we heard about, school administrators and visiting committees have been holding schools to the “primary consideration” statement from SACS (“An institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline.” SACS 2012 *Principles of Accreditation*, p. 30, item 3.7.1) and ignoring alternative methods for certification laid out in the *Principles* (“The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes.”) Dr. Wheelan was cordial and surprised to hear that accreditation issues were still taking place and that visiting committees were part of the problem. As a result of our discussion, she asked her staff to review the training given to visiting committee members.

The last sentence of the SACS credentialing guidelines, Section 3.7.1, states “For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty.” However, there is no standardized rubric for this documentation. We decided to set up an informal task force to create a position paper that could provide guidance for faculty and administrators who wish to credential faculty using the alternative competencies described in the SACS *Principles*. The task force (Table 1) was composed of representatives from the four societies whose members are most involved with teaching anatomy and/or physiology: HAPS, APS, American Association of Anatomists (AAA), and the American Association of Clinical Anatomists (AACA).

**Table 1: Members of the anatomy and physiology credentialing task force**

Jennifer Burgoon	Division of Anatomy	Ohio State University
Robert Carroll	Department of Physiology	East Carolina School of Medicine
Jon Jackson	Department of Anatomy & Cell Biology	University of North Dakota School of Medicine
Rebecca Lufler	Department of Anatomy & Cellular Biology	Tufts University School of Medicine
Valerie O’Loughlin	Department of Anatomy & Cell Biology	Indiana University, Bloomington
Rebecca Pratt	Department of Radiology, Anatomy Division	Michigan State University College of Medicine
Dee Silverthorn (Chair)	Integrative Biology	University of Texas at Austin

In collaboration with Susan Musante and Jay Labov from the National Academy of Sciences, we also developed a multipart plan to attack the problem at a national level. In the first step,

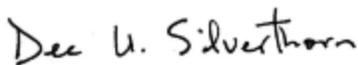
professional societies representing faculty in subdisciplines of biology would create specific guidelines for what constitutes appropriate background for someone teaching that topic. The second step is a position paper that will be issued by AIBS addressing the broader issue of what make someone qualified to teach in the biological sciences and referencing the society-approved guidelines. A draft of this paper has been developed. The third step will be, we hope, a NAS-sponsored gathering that brings together faculty, administrators, and representatives from the national accrediting bodies to discuss appropriate ways for colleges and universities to certify that their faculty are qualified to teach. There have been articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* discussing credentialing problems in business schools and in non-science disciplines such as history, so faculty certification is an issue that extends beyond the biological sciences.

The revised position paper created by the task force includes an expanded “checklist of qualifications” as well as an example of a “crosswalk document” that shows how specific competencies a faculty member has acquired relate directly to specific learning outcomes for the courses he/she is teaching. The crosswalk sample was provided by someone who used it successfully to defend her credentials. In the position paper we have also tried to show why graduate degree program titles and course prefixes may not be an accurate indicator of a person’s training and therefore may not be the best criterion for credentialing.

At its May 2013 meeting the Board of Directors of the Human Anatomy & Physiology Society approved the position paper on appropriate ways to credential faculty during accreditation reviews. It is being distributed to the other societies this summer in the hope that after they discuss it and provide feedback, we can create a collaborative position paper that has the support of the four societies: HAPS, APS, AAA, and AACA.

In the meantime, we are posting this letter and the HAPS-approved version of the position statement on the HAPS website for use by HAPS members whose schools may be scheduled for accreditation review.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the position paper. We hope you find it useful.



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