September 8, 2014

Molly Corbett Broad, President
Cathy Sandeen, Vice President for Education Attainment and Innovation
American Council on Education

Dear President Broad and Vice President Sandeen,

At the request of the American Council on Education, in the Spring of 2014 an Academic Review Task Force was convened to review the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service. The charge of the Academic Review Task Force was to review the policies and procedures governing the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service (military and non-military) and to recommend any changes or improvements with the goals of providing quality control by external evaluators, greater transparency to ACE’s processes, and to increase the understanding and acceptance of ACE credit recommendations. Members of the Task Force came from a range of higher education institutions, educational associations, accreditation organizations, and industry that have experience with credit for prior learning.

The Task Force worked over a period of five months during which Task Force members reviewed documents and data reflecting current criteria, policies, and procedures for the credit recommendation process, met in-person with each other and with ACE staff, submitted written feedback, and participated in conference calls.

At its final meeting on July 28, 2014, the Academic Review Task Force that reviewed the ACE course evaluation and credit recommendation service considered and voted to approve its final report and recommendations and offers the following comments:

ACE is to be commended for the quality of its criteria, processes, and procedures and for being a leader in providing a means for students to obtain valid academic credit for formal learning that did not occur in a college or university setting, including military occupational analyses. In particular, Task Force members commented favorably on the following practices. The ACE course evaluation process currently exercises a high level of rigor that can be said to be at least comparable to how most institutions evaluate the quality of their own new courses. The ACE evaluation process has been a leader in its focus on student learning outcomes as a cornerstone of its review process and should continue to emphasize this approach. The faculty-driven review model elevates the quality of the final recommendations and supports potential acceptance by institutions of ACE credit recommendations as transfer credit. ACE is adept at creating teams of evaluators, faculty, teaching experts, and
occasionally non-faculty content specialists that are matched to the content and format of the specific course being evaluated.

In addition to these commendations, the Task Force identified several areas for ACE’s continued attention:

ACE has credibility in the higher education community and can provide a valuable service in conducting quality reviews for newer course formats, newer providers and newer credentials (e.g., badges, certificate programs, and competency-based programs) as long as new services are conducted in such a way that will complement ACE’s historical strengths and quality in course evaluations.

The review process should:

- Reinforce the “federal definition” of academically engaged time rather than time in a classroom. As the federal definition evolves with potentially greater adoption of a competency-based or mastery model, review processes should adapt to these as well.
- Provide additional guidance (e.g. a rubric) to assist course evaluators in defining content, scope, rigor, breadth and depth of learning and consider providing a summary of this guidance to the public as a means to communicate the rigor of ACE’s process.
- Continue work to develop a pool of qualified and effective faculty course evaluators to include faculty with experience reflecting new pedagogical modalities as they evolve (e.g., online learning and competency-based approaches). Continue efforts to have evaluator pool reflect geographic and sector diversity. Continue efforts to orient, train, calibrate, and evaluate faculty course reviewers. Provide a list of course evaluators by title, type of faculty appointment, and name of institution (no names of individuals) to the public as a means to communicate the diversity and quality of ACE course reviewers.

In terms of future quality review of the credit recommendation and related services, the Task Force recommended the following: (1) conduct annual internal review of program processes reflected in the Task Force Report; (2) prepare a mid-review report by December 31, 2016 to include progress on implementation of Task Force recommendations and any substantive changes to the program; (3) initiate an external review cycle again in January 2019.

The Task Force wishes to express its appreciation to the Center for Education Attainment and Innovation for the extensive work that it undertook in preparing for and supporting this review. We commend the Center and ACE for its commitment to maintaining high quality in its processes and procedures and for engaging external evaluators in this effort.

Sincerely,

Michael V. Reilly, Chair
ACE Academic Review Task Force