

# Executive Director's Annual Report

By Roger J. Williams

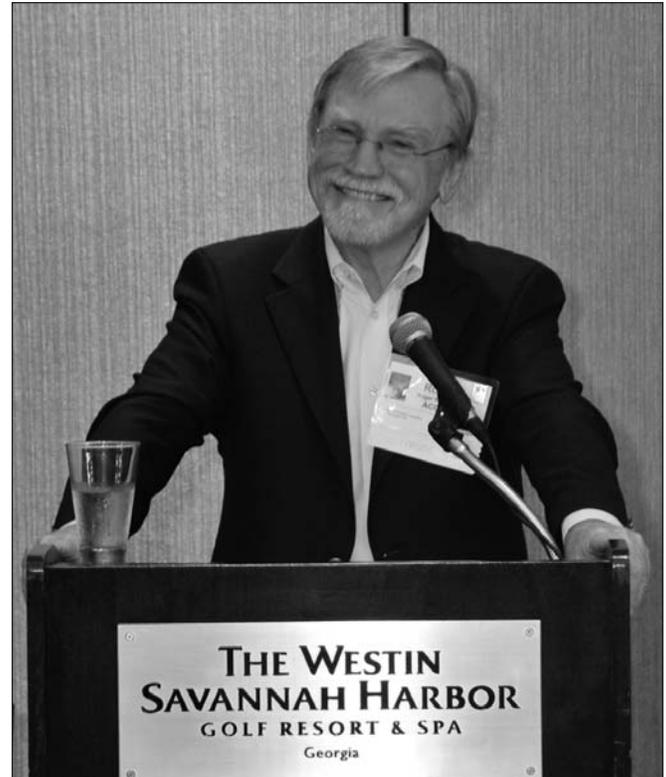
In preparation for my Annual Report to the ACCET membership, I had initially prepared a traditional Executive Director's report containing various data and statistics. However, as I was reviewing my notes, I scrapped that approach and decided to just "talk" with you about some things that I feel need to be discussed. In part I think this was inspired by the Q & A session, Town Hall meeting earlier in the day, which gave rise to a broad set of issues having to do with this doleful economy, the incessant bad press and congressional scrutiny of for-profit education, a radically changing regulatory climate, and ACCET's role in this unraveling environment.

---

***Tragically, there are those who have fallen back into the patterns of the past, often acting under the demands of the publicly traded marketplace for growth where too often the primary criteria for success are starts and revenue with a secondary focus on actual benefit to students.***

---

Now in our 36th year, ACCET has weathered the numerous changes and challenges that have affected our private postsecondary sector over the past decades. In a long bygone era, both proprietary schools and national accrediting agencies were regularly cast in the harshest terms, and, after a brief period of what now seems like the golden years, once again appear to have been called into question as Capitol Hill and the media have become overwrought with the "bad-apple" crowd in our sector. The resultant broad brushstroke of condemnation and indignation against the excesses uncovered has once again tainted us all. Tragically, there are those who have fallen back into the patterns of the past, often acting under the demands of the publicly traded marketplace for growth where too often the primary criteria for success



are starts and revenue with a secondary focus on actual benefit to students.

ACCET accredited schools have had the longstanding requirement of clearly defined benchmarks to keep the focus on providing quality training to their students, aimed specifically at achieving positive outcomes in student satisfaction, certification, completion, and placement rates, which in turn has served as a mission-centered report card on critical metrics for success at each institution. These measures were not easily adopted, achieved, or maintained, but thanks to the leadership and support of the Commission and the vast majority of our member institutions it has led to a heightened level of accountability and credibility.

ACCET has worked diligently to maintain the balance of entrepreneurial vigor and educational soundness, likely benefitted by a markedly diverse group of member organizations—with approximately 50 percent vocational, Title IV

institutions and the other 50 percent consisting of corporate training, intensive English training for international students, and various short-term continuing education for personal and professional development—which must ultimately enhance the value to students in the job market where we find the truest long-term indicator of success for both your graduates and your enterprises.

### **Tough Standards**

By most accounts ACCET is considered a tough accrediting agency. We prefer the term rigorous and focus on outcomes measurements for student success, which in turn constitute a level of accountability that is an ongoing challenge for both the agency and its accredited institutions. This comes at a price, representing both a blessing and a burden, in that it sets an expectation that dissuades many of those looking for an easy entry into accredited status—and as a footnote approximately 25 percent of initial applicants never achieve it with us—but it also subjects an agency to criticism from those who expect more than it can reliably deliver. No matter how rigorous the process and standards are, unless you go out and visit the school every morning you cannot reliably know exactly what's going on each day, and this is apparently a surprise to distant observers.

---

***By most accounts ACCET is considered a tough accrediting agency. We prefer the term rigorous and focus on outcomes measurements for student success, which in turn constitute a level of accountability that is an ongoing challenge for both the agency and its accredited institutions.***

---

The only time you know definitively is when you conduct an on-site visit, and depending upon the length of the grant and whether interim visits such as ACCET's Quality Assurance Unannounced Visits are conducted, that could still be years. This leads to a consideration on why the length of

an accreditation grant should be limited (ACCET's is a five-year maximum) and why it needs to be modulated to reflect the Commission's good judgment on a case by case basis relative to the institution's demonstrated track record (approximately half of the ACCET grants are for three-year terms). There are those who would argue that accreditation standards represent an acceptable minimum performance and, therefore, those institutions that meet them deserve the full length of a grant; an argument that, perhaps, belies common sense and experience to the benefit of self-interest.

---

***When you take care of your students' best interests, both their future and yours are on a sounder footing, and at the end of a day's work, that is an accomplishment worthy of more than a paycheck—more specifically pride and respect.***

---

By its very nature accreditation is a complicated amalgam of interests for which the internal and external checks and balances, such as public members on Commissions and USDE recognition criteria, respectively, must be tethered to the larger public interest if this self-regulatory, peer review evaluation process is to be valued and respected.

### **Changing Performance and Perceptions**

ACCET was the pariah of accreditation in 1990 and deservedly so. In those early years, I can recall a pervasive level of suspicion at the federal and state agencies, to the point where even getting a returned telephone call was a challenge.

By most accounts all the accrediting agencies were held in low esteem, with a particular contempt reserved for the nationals, and there was no simple remedy beyond the daily grind of hard work and tough decisions that eventually served to garner the benefit of doubt.

I thought it would take a year or two, but that turned out to be wishful thinking, as a reputation—both on the way up and the way

---

down—takes far longer to reach the consensus level needed to support it. We have achieved a level of recognition and respect for not simply trying to do our job right, but for having had the necessary critical mass of dedicated members standing together as we trimmed out over half the ACCET institutions accredited in 1990, when we had 449 main campuses with over a 1100 training sites compared with the current 234 main campuses and 668 training sites. There were and still are a small number of schools that did not agree with, much less like, the higher standards and rigor in the early stages and some of them left for other agencies; but I cannot recall any heading in reverse. When you mention policy Document 28.1—Completion and Placement

Statistics, the tracking form ACCET requires to account for every student’s enrollment, graduation, and employment progress, to any ACCET vocational school, you may see a raised eyebrow or perhaps an occasional grimace, but I think there would also be a respectful recognition of it as a very straightforward measure that no one can argue with; although there are those who have been found to use an excessive amount of creativity in defining training-related employment.

When you take care of your students’ best interests, both their future and yours are on a sounder footing, and at the end of a day’s work, that is an accomplishment worthy of more than a paycheck—more specifically pride and respect.

## From the Conference Chair

Sandra Lockwood

“The unique southern charm and rich history of Savannah formed an excellent backdrop for ACCET’s 2010 Annual Conference. It seemed to soothe many of our attendees’ fragile nerves over the regulatory stresses that loom with unknown characteristics in the path ahead. The 228 attendees enjoyed excellent keynote speakers and a strong program of breakout topics delivered by industry professionals. The exhibit hall was sold out, and, of course, is always a centerpiece of the conference.

“An attendee from a rather large group of schools commented: ‘I was impressed by how good the breakouts were! Informative and not “salesy” as is sometimes challenging for vendors.... I was very impressed. Both keynotes were also relevant and kept things tied together and to the conference theme...very nice.’ Another attendee wrote in his conference summary, ‘Of all the conferences and continuing education seminars I attended this year, ACCET’s was the most beneficial.’ And yet another stated, ‘...we like how the breakouts are in line with industry current issues. We brought



four of our staff and wish we could have brought everyone. Excellent job!”

“As chair of the conference, I am proud of the program we host, the fun we have, and the rich bond of friendships we share from year to year.

“You are all invited to join us next year at the Westin LaPaloma Hotel & Resort in Tucson, October 26–28, 2011.”



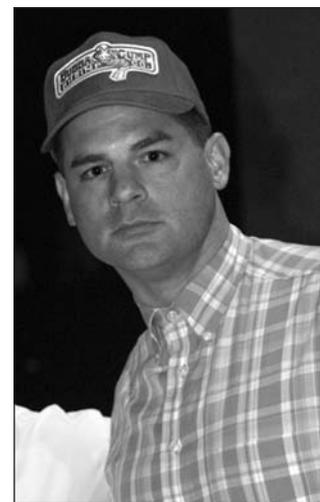
**Roger Williams** takes questions at the annual town hall meeting.



**Dewayne Matthews**, Lumina Foundation for Education, delivered the opening keynote presentation.



**Peter Smith**, Kaplan Higher Education, delivered the closing presentation on the New Ecology of Learning.



**A Sampling of Savannah**  
Pralines on the lawn and a visit from Forest Gump.

## “Serious” Conversation in the Exhibit Hall



**Fardad Fateri with Robert Johnson**



**Robert and Elizabeth Schaeffer with Roger Williams**



**Sharon Bob and Mike Lambert**



Batman is in the building. That is **Gary Yasuda's** faithful dog, "Batman."



**And the winner is...**  
Conference co-chair, **Darlene Foret**, conducts one of many prize drawings at an exhibitor's booth.



Well planned, highly organized and flawlessly execution. After 20 years of serving as conference chair, **Sandy Lockwood** is on top of her game.