

Life University's Accreditation Denied

WILL RETAIN ACCREDITATION THROUGH APPEALS PROCESS

Editorial Staff

The Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) released a statement on June 10, 2002 that the accreditation of Life University College of Chiropractic would not be renewed.¹

The statement was from Joseph Brimhall, DC, chairman of the CCE's Commission on Accreditation. It read:

"The Commission on Accreditation (COA) of the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) has completed the process for review of the application for reaffirmation of accreditation as submitted by Life University College of Chiropractic (LUCC), located in Marietta, Georgia.

"Previous COA actions in this matter have included imposition of a public sanction of probation and deferral, for the maximum allowable time period of one year, of a decision regarding the LUCC application for reaffirmation of accreditation.

"The COA decision is to deny reaffirmation of accreditation for LUCC. This decision constitutes revocation of accredited status with the COA. The COA has determined that there is compelling reason for immediate public disclosure of this decision.

"Revocation of accreditation constitutes an adverse action. Therefore, the revocation will not take effect until the time period for filing an appeal has expired or until final action has been taken on any such appeal.

"For reinstatement of accredited status with the COA, the program must follow the process for initial accreditation as outlined in the current CCE Standards.

"Given the confidential nature of the accreditation relationship, and in view of a potential appeal process, no further or more specific information about this matter will be provided in the current circumstances.

"Accreditation procedures and requirements are found in the CCE Standards for Doctor of Chiropractic Programs and Institutions and may be referenced at the CCE website: www.cce-usa.org."

The same day the CCE made its announcement, Life University made this announcement to its students:²

Accreditation Status: June 10, 2002

"Life University College of Chiropractic representatives met on June 7, 2002, with the CCE Commission on Accreditation. Because we recognize how important this issue is for all of us, we are notifying you immediately of the actions of the COA. We have been verbally informed that the Commission did not reaffirm the Life University College of Chiropractic's accreditation. The Board of Trustees, administration and faculty will immediately proceed with the appeal process and legal avenues that may entail several years. The College of Chiropractic remains fully accredited during the appeal process and therefore your financial aid, student loans, and academic status will not be affected. Life University will take any and all legal actions necessary to protect its accredited status, students, faculty and staff.

"Official written notification has not been received at this time; however, we will keep you informed of further developments via the campus intranet and the Life University web site (www.life.edu). Pertinent information will be available in the library.

"Life University is accredited by CCE and SACS. Our accreditation with SACS remains fully intact.

"Life University encourages you to enjoy your summer vacation and upon return, be assured that you will be able to continue your studies toward the Doctor of Chiropractic degree with your financial aid intact."

Mamie Ware, PhD

Vice President Academic Affairs

Life University was originally placed on probation by the CCE on June 13, 2001. At that time, the CCE's Commission on Accreditation made the following remarks:

"The COA has deferred a decision regarding reaffirmation of accreditation and has imposed a sanction of Probation for the failure of LUCC to comply with established accreditation criteria. The COA has also determined that immediate public disclosure of this action is warranted. The COA has provided LUCC with information regarding specific deficiencies that must be corrected to maintain CCE accreditation.

"A sanction of Probation is imposed to indicate serious deficiencies toward compliance with the requirements of the CCE Standards for Doctor of Chiropractic Programs and Institutions (Standards). The CCE Standards stipulate that the COA may revoke accredited status if a program or institution fails to correct noted deficiencies or otherwise fails to comply with requirements stated in the Standards."

In addition to the actions of the CCE, Life's regional accreditation was placed on a "warning" status for one year by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) last December³ for:

"failure to comply with *Criteria* Section 3.1 (Planning and Evaluation: Educational Programs), Section 3.2 (Planning and Evaluation: Administrative and Educational Support Services), Section 4.8.2.2 (Academic and Professional Preparation - Baccalaureate), Section 6.1.2 (Organization and Administration - Governing Board), and Section 6.3.1 (Financial Resources)."

Prior to the CCE's decision, representatives from Life appeared at the January 2002 meeting of the Commission on Accreditation. The COA reviewed reports and other information submitted by Life to resolve the concerns of the CCE-COA sanction of probation and the COA deferral of a decision regarding reaffirmation of accredited status.

After reviewing the material submitted by Life, the COA determined that further inquiry and inspection were necessary, and continued the sanction of probation and the deferral of a decision regarding reaffirmation of accreditation, pending receipt of additional information. The COA was concerned, in part, with "the degree to which LUCC graduates are trained to serve as primary care chiropractic physicians and clinicians, as defined in the CCE "Standards for Doctor of Chiropractic Degree Programs and Institutions."

The day after the announcement to deny reaffirmation of accreditation (June 11, 2002), another statement was released by COA chair Joseph Brimhall,DC, that included these additional comments:

"The CCE Commission on Accreditation (COA) decision to revoke the accredited status of Life University College of Chiropractic (LUCC) is the most serious adverse action possible for this body. The COA deferred the accreditation decision last year and allowed the maximum time period of one year, as provided under our process, for LUCC to demonstrate compliance with CCE accreditation requirements. Were it not for a CCE appeal process designed and provided to insure utmost fairness and all reasonable opportunity for review of such a COA decision, the accredited status of LUCC would be ended at this time.

"According to CCE policy COA 8, CCE provides a 30-day period (from June 10, 2002) during which LUCC can decide whether or not to appeal the COA decision. Even though the COA has decided to revoke the accreditation of LUCC, the accredited status will be extended during that 30-day period. If LUCC gives proper notice of intent to appeal, the accredited status will further extend during the actual process of appeal and until the appeal process ends.

"It is not possible to predict the actual amount of time required for such an appeal process, but it would seem that such a process could be completed within 90 to 120 days from its instigation. All in all, it seems reasonable to estimate that, should LUCC decide to appeal, the appeal process could be concluded at some point in October or November of 2002 time."

On June 12, Life University responded with a press release:

"Life University Board of Trustees will appeal the decision of the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) Commission on Accreditation to deny reaffirmation of accreditation of its doctor of chiropractic program. The university will pursue academic dialogue with the Commission and other necessary means in an effort to address the decision.

"The University seeks this dialogue as a means of pursuing the appeal process established by the CCE, and to assure that the college of chiropractic is treated fairly in the appeal process.

"The chiropractic science and philosophy as espoused by Life University College of Chiropractic emphasizes that chiropractors are to focus their care on the diagnosis and adjustment of the spinal column and other articulations of the human body, while referring patients to other healthcare providers when clinically indicated.

"Life University has always strived to meet the qualities of CCE programs and institutions through its commitment to excellence. This includes quality administration and governing board; soundness of institutional programs; professional ability of its faculty and staff; excellence of its facilities; and financial strength. Dr. Sid Williams, Life University founder and president, recognizes the Commission on Accreditation as the highest authority in chiropractic education, and as a result, the University is pursuing the appeal process."

On June 13, Life's founder and president, Dr. Sid Williams, announced he was planning to retire in March 2003 after a candidate for president of the university was named and brought up to par. While there is much left to conjecture, the CCE appeals process is specific:

"No appeal will be considered unless the notice of intent to appeal is received by the CCE Executive Vice President on or before the 30th day following the postmark date of the letter communicating the COA written decision to the DCP (Doctor of Chiropractic Degree Program - in this case Life University College of Chiropractic's program).

"Appeals will be considered by an Appeal Panel specially appointed by the CCE President. The appeal panel will not receive DCP documents or testimony on events or progress made subsequent to the COA decision. DCP improvements alleged to have been made subsequent to the site team visit, and which can be verified only via another site team visit, provide the basis for another evaluation - not for an appeal. The panel will sustain the COA findings of fact unless the DCP clearly demonstrates, on the basis of reliable, substantial, probative evidence before the appeal panel, that a COA finding is erroneous.

"Not later than 30 days from the postmark date of its letter of intent to appeal, the DCP will file with the CCE Executive Vice President, either in person or by certified mail, a document setting forth its arguments and evidence in support of the appeal. Failure to file an appeal document within this time period shall result in a dismissal of the appeal.

"The COA will file a responsive memorandum setting forth its arguments and evidence in opposition to the appeal no later than 60 days from the receipt of the DCP's written appeal document.

"After considering all available relevant information, the appeal panel decision will be one of the following:

1. To sustain the COA action; or
2. To remand to the COA for reconsideration of their action, with recommendations for appropriate action.

"The written decision of the appeal panel, including a statement of the specifics upon which that decision is based, will be sent to the CCE Executive Vice President, COA Chairperson, and to the DCP chief administrative officer, the institution's CEO, the governing board chair, and others as the institution may designate.

"If the appeal panel remands the appeal to the COA, the COA must reconsider its action in light of panel recommendations. The COA must either uphold its original decision or issue a new decision, with reason. This decision will then be sent to the DCP chief administrative officer, the institution's CEO, the governing board chair, and others as the institution may designate.

"The COA Chairperson will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education, other appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public within 30 days following a final decision to place a DCP on probation, or to deny or terminate accreditation."

Awash in all of this are the students of Life University. While some students are taking a "wait and see" approach, many are calling other chiropractic colleges to see what their transfer options are. A few of these competing chiropractic colleges are being accused of flying recruiters to begin prospecting at local establishments frequented by Life students.

The question remains whether Dr. Sid Williams can find a way to satisfy the Commission on Accreditation through the appeals process or another avenue. The answer should come in the next

six months.

References

1. CCE announcement. June 10, 2002. <http://www.cce-usa.org/#E>
2. Accreditation status. June 10, 2002 Life University.
http://www.life.edu/academics/cce_accreditation_061002.html
3. Accreditation actions taken December 10, 2001. Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. <http://www.sacscoc.org/>

JULY 2002