



NEWS / PROFESSION

## **Life Returns to Normal**

ONCE-TROUBLED CHIROPRACTIC SCHOOL RECEIVES CCE ACCREDITATION

Michael Devitt

On Nov. 12, 2005, the Council on Chiropractic Education's Commission on Accreditation (COA) announced it had granted accreditation to the doctor of chiropractic program at Life University. The announcement, delivered at a COA meeting in Phoenix, Ariz., provided a fitting conclusion to what many consider the most tumultuous four-year period in the university's history.



**"Life's future is now in its own hands." - Dr. Guy Riekerman, president of Life University**

"Word of CCE-accredited status of our chiropractic program is evidence that Life's future is again in its own hands," remarked Dr. Guy Riekeman, the university's president since March 2004, "and frankly, that future looks very bright." He added that through his administration's efforts, the school has overcome numerous financial and educational obstacles, and now is on track to "become a different institution from what it once was."

The announcement by the CCE comes 11 months after the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) released Life from a sustained period of academic probation and reaffirmed its regional accreditation. Had SACS chosen to revoke Life's accreditation, rather than placing it on probation, the school's students would not have qualified for federally subsidized student loans, and the university almost certainly would have been forced to shutter its doors. Instead, faculty, alumni and supporters of the college raised more than \$5 million to help bring Life out of debt and make the university more financially stable. (For a more detailed look at the ongoing at Life over the previous four years, see "Life's Ups and Downs" at the end of this article.)

"Several factors have contributed to our progress, including extraordinary commitment from chiropractors nationally and internationally, as well as financial and business support from the greater Atlanta community," noted Dr. Riekeman. He also cited a number of administrative changes, including a near-complete reorganization of the university's board of trustees, which has imbued the school with "a new vision" of what Life University will become.

"We certainly have come a long way in less than two years, but Life isn't interested in getting back to where it was. We want to take it to a whole new place of excellence, integrity and accomplishment."

#### Life's Ups and Downs: A Timeline, 2001-2005

June 13, 2001: The CCE places Life's chiropractic program on probation, based in part on the Commission on Accreditation's findings of "serious deficiencies toward compliance with the requirements of the CCE Standards for Doctor of Chiropractic Programs and Institutions."

Dec. 10, 2001: SACS issues a "public warning" regarding the accreditation of Life's non-chiropractic programs. The warning cites the university's failure to comply with numerous educational, administrative, organizational and financial criteria, and recommends 52 separate changes to the school's infrastructure.

June 7, 2002: The CCE releases a statement that the accreditation of Life University College of Chiropractic would not be renewed, pending a 30-day appeals period. Four days later, COA chair Joseph Brimhall, DC, releases a separate statement that says, in part, "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."

June 12, 2002: The Life University Board of Trustees announces it will appeal the CCE's decision. June 13, 2002: Dr. Sid Williams, Life's founder and then-president, announces his intention to retire in March 2003, coinciding with his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. On July 8, 2002, he informs university students and faculty that he is resigning from every aspect of Life's operations, "effective immediately." Dr. Williams' wife Nell and daughter Kim also resign at that time; Michael J. Schmidt, DC, is named interim president.

Oct. 20, 2002: The CCE rejects Life's appeal and revokes the chiropractic program's accreditation, effective immediately. Ironically, on the same day, Ben DeSpain, EdD, is announced as the new president of Life University.

Dec. 10, 2002: Following a year-long review, SACS places Life's non-chiropractic programs on probation for one year.

Jan. 2, 2003: Life files suit against the CCE, seeking immediate reinstatement of accreditation of its doctor of chiropractic degree program, along with monetary damages caused by reduced student tuition and negative publicity.

Feb. 10, 2003: After hearing opinions from both sides, federal Judge Charles E. Moyer Jr. grants a preliminary injunction that restores CCE accreditation to Life's chiropractic program retroactive to June 2002.

Aug. 21, 2003: After a protracted legal battle, officials from Life and CCE reach an agreement to settle any issues concerning Life's accreditation out of court. Under the agreement, Life is allowed to maintain its chiropractic accreditation through Judge Moyer's injunction, but must still apply for reaccreditation at a later date.

March 4, 2004: Following a special meeting of Life's board of trustees, Dr. Guy Riekeman, one-time president of the Palmer University System, is named president of Life University, replacing Dr. DeSpain.

Sept. 11, 2004: Sid Williams appears at the annual convention of the Georgia Council of Chiropractic and asks members of the organization to "step up" and help support Life University.

Dec. 7, 2004: SACS reaffirms Life's regional accreditation status at an association meeting in Atlanta.

Nov. 12, 2005: The CCE's Commission on Accreditation formally accredits the doctor of chiropractic program at Life University College of Chiropractic.

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