

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

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Barbara Gellman-Danley, president of the Higher Learning Commission, to lead C-RAC ***New leader aims to work with accreditors to be a more powerful force in policy debates and to make significant improvements across higher education sectors and regions on behalf of the students they serve.***

WASHINGTON, D.C.—July 5, 2017—Barbara Gellman-Danley, president of the Chicago-based Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that assures the quality of higher education in 19 states in the north central region of the United States, will be the new chair of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), the organization announced today. Elizabeth H. Sibolski, president of Middle States Commission on Higher Education, will serve as C-RAC's vice chair.

C-RAC is a collective of the nation's seven regional organizations responsible for the accreditation of roughly 3,000 of the nation's colleges and universities.

Dr. Gellman-Danley, who will serve a two-year term, follows Barbara Brittingham, the head of the New England accrediting commission, as C-RAC chair. Dr. Brittingham played a significant role in leading the nation's regional accreditors to speak in a unified voice on key policy issues at a time of great uncertainty in the accreditation field. Under Brittingham's leadership, over the past two years C-RAC has become an outspoken advocate against the use of single "bright-line" measures in assessing institutional quality and has encouraged improvements in federal higher education data. Last year, C-RAC also introduced The Graduation Rate Initiative, intended to help accelerate improvement among institutions with chronically low graduation rates.

In her new role, Dr. Gellman-Danley says she will continue to build on C-RAC's momentum as accreditors become more proactive partners in driving institutional change. "Regional accreditors aren't sitting back to wait for review cycles to conclude before taking action," she says. "We monitor what is happening at each of our institutions every year and are active instigators of change. By improving our research capacities and developing new approaches to quality assurance, from predictive analytics to benchmarking studies, we can work not only to strengthen higher education one institution at a time, but also to bolster performance across entire higher education sectors in every region of the country."

For example, as part of C-RAC's Graduation Rate Initiative, Dr. Gellman-Danley and her team at HLC are conducting a survey research project to understand more about how low, mid-range, and higher-performing institutions in the region address student retention.

As head of HLC since 2014, Barbara Gellman-Danley also has implemented a new strategic plan, worked to bolster the organization's research capacity and identify data points that accurately track student success, increased the diversity of peer reviewers, and strengthened the organization's ability to advocate for improvements in policy and practice that can improve student outcomes. She has testified before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee on the role of accreditation in higher education



Barbara Gellman-Danley,

and, with funding from the Lumina Foundation, created a think tank called Partners for Transformation to spark innovation in student success and quality assurance, calling upon experts and institutions within the HLC region.

Prior to joining HLC, Dr. Gellman-Danley was the president of University of Rio Grande & Rio Grande Community College from 2009-2014. She has served as a vice chancellor at the Ohio Board of Regents, president at Antioch University McGregor, vice president at Monroe Community College, and vice chancellor at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. She also served as a peer reviewer for HLC for a decade.

Dr. Gellman-Danley holds a Bachelor of Science from Syracuse University, a Master of Library Science from Simmons College, a Master of Business Administration from Oklahoma City University, and a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Oklahoma. She also did post-graduate work at New York University and earned continuing education from Cornell University, Harvard University and the University of Chicago.

About C-RAC

C-RAC is a collective of seven regional organizations responsible for the accreditation of roughly 3,000 of the nation's colleges and universities. They are: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, WASC; Higher Learning Commission; Middle States Commission on Higher Education; New England Association of Schools and Colleges—Commission on Institutions of Higher Education; Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges; and WASC Senior College and University Commission.

For more information, please visit www.c-rac.org.

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