

History of the Accreditation of Elizabethtown College

Accreditation is an important process for colleges and universities. The process of accreditation is important because of the purpose it serves for colleges and universities, which include helping to “determine if an institution meets or exceeds minimum standards of quality,” “helps students determine acceptable institutions for enrollment,” “helps employers determine eligibility for employee tuition reimbursement programs,” and “creates goals for institutional self-improvement.” In addition to this, accreditation is important because “students must attend an accredited institution to apply for federal grants or loans.”¹ This importance is shown in the 2014-2015 academic year, in which “the percentage of first-time, full-time undergraduate students at 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions awarded financial aid was eighty-six percent.”² Thus, if a college or university is not accredited, it will not be able to reward financial aid and therefore will not be able to bring in or maintain a student population that is high enough to allow the institution to continue being open. Elizabethtown College is no exception to this, as ninety-seven percent of students receive financial aid directly from the college.³ Elizabethtown College is accredited, though, and has been since 1948.⁴

Being accredited in 1948 leaves a gap of forty-nine years of existence before the college was accredited. Despite the college being founded in 1899, its opening day was not until 13 November, 1900. When the college officially opened, it was very different from the Elizabethtown College that exists today. On 13 November, 1900, the college had enrolled just six students, far fewer than the nearly 2,000 that are enrolled today. These six students, Kurwin D. Henry, Warren H. Ziegler, Rufus P. Bucher, John K. Boll, Walter A. Kittinger, and Willis S. Heisey, were known as the “Faithful Six.”⁵ The events of the day were different as well, with the first day of classes not beginning just with classes but with “a chapel exercise, at which G. N. Falkenstein read the twenty-third Psalm.”⁶ The college also met in Heisey Hall for the first week of its existence, before moving to a more suitable house owned by Joseph H. Rider.⁷ These modest beginnings of the college were the beginning of a forty-nine-year-long journey to accreditation.

However, this journey did not quite last for the full forty-nine years. The college was not able to secure credit from the State Department of Public Instruction, and the need to become a “standardized college grew more acute.” Once the college fulfilled the financial requirement for accreditation, the Board met and unanimously decided that the college needed to adopt a new charter allowing the college the ability to grant degrees. The college applied for its new charter and the ability to grant degrees on 25 June 1921, and it was certified as an application by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction in court. On 19 December, 1921, in Harrisburg, the State Council of Education announced in court “the course of instruction and the standard of admission and the composition of the faculty are sufficient and that the educational needs of the locality and of the Commonwealth at large are likely to be met by the granting to such corporation the privilege of conferring degrees of art pure and applied science philosophy and literature and theology, but not including law and medicine, do approve the same.” This was announced by the college on 21 December 1921 once the telegram was received by the college. This announcement prompted the college to declare the remainder of the day a holiday and to have a celebration on Thursday 22 December 1921. The first to receive their baccalaureate degrees were the class of 1922, comprised of A.C. Baugher, Mary Hershey Crouthamel, Ada M. Douty, John F. Graham,

¹ “The Importance of Accreditation,” Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://www.acics.org/students/content.aspx?id=4320>

² “Sources of Financial Aid,” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed October 24, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cuc.asp

³ “Financial Aid,” Elizabethtown College, accessed October 24, 2017, <https://www.etown.edu/offices/financial-aid/>

⁴ Jean-Paul Benowitz, *Images of America: Elizabethtown* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 84

⁵ Ralph W. Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899-1970* (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Elizabethtown College), 40

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Ephiram M. Hertzler, Supera Mertz, Nathan G. Meyer, L. Anna Schwenk, Samuel P. Sumpman, Ezra Wenger, William A. Willoughby, and Anna Wolgemuth.⁸

At the time of its full accreditation, the college's president was A.C. Baugher, one of those to be the first to receive a baccalaureate degree from the college. In addition to being a graduate of Elizabethtown College, Baugher was also a professor of chemistry from 1922-1928 and the dean of the college from 1928-1941, and had much experience with the college before ascending to its presidency.⁹ Baugher was the college's ninth president, holding the position from 1941-1961, and is described as "chiefly responsible for the college's accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools."¹⁰ A committee selected to visit the college in the spring of 1948 to report their findings back to the Commission of Accreditation visited from 14-16 March, 1948. "The time for the committee's visitation," Schlosser wrote, "was the most auspicious in my thirty-three years' acquaintance with Elizabethtown College. Student morale was high, the esprit de corps of the Faculty and administrative staff was at its best, and the general social and cultural climate was professionally most congenial. The College was at its best without trying to be on parade."¹¹ Thursday 6 May 1948 was the day the phone call came to the college from the Chairman of the Commission, Dr. Frank Bowles, as well as a letter of confirmation, saying Elizabethtown College had been voted to receive accreditation. This, coming twenty-seven years after being granted the ability to provide baccalaureate degrees in 1921, gave the college "full academic standing among the leading colleges of the United States through accreditation by the Middle States Association."¹²

⁸ Ibid, 100-105.

⁹ "Presidential History," Elizabethtown College, accessed October 20, 2017, <https://www.etown.edu/about/history/presidential-history.aspx>

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Benowitz, Peter J. Depuydt, *Elizabethtown College* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 74

¹¹ Ralph W. Schlosser, *History of Elizabethtown College 1899-1970* (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, Elizabethtown College), 192.

¹² Ibid, 193.