**TOPIC:** DEGREE AUTHORIZATION: RECOMMENDATION FOR PROBATIONARY AUTHORIZATION OF ASPEN UNIVERSITY

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1. **SUMMARY**

This action item recommends a change of status for Aspen University from Full to Probation for its Colorado location based on CCHE policy Section I, Part J and the responsibility of institutions to notify Department staff regarding changes in accreditation.

1. **BACKGROUND**

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) has statutory responsibility for the administration of Title 23, Article 2 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, commonly referred to as the Degree Authorization Act, which sets the terms under which private, not-for-profit and certain other types of institutions may offer degrees or degree credits.

Aspen University (University), located in Denver, is a for-profit postsecondary institution that offers programs from the Certificate level through Doctorate programs in a variety of concentrations and disciplines.

Aspen University received authorization from the CCHE in 1994 under the name, The International School of Information Management, an institution that was based initially in California and then relocated to Colorado in 1993. In June of 2003, the school underwent a name change and the name of Aspen University was approved. The University has been continuously accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission since 1993. The University is due for its next accreditation renewal in 2024.

In April 2021, Department staff met virtually with the President and Interim Provost of Aspen University to discuss its Colorado authorization. Specifically, the leadership at the University was seeking information with regard to the Place of Business authorization under CCHE policy as the University has a campus in Phoenix, Arizona as well as the Denver, Colorado campus. Staff walked through the varying authorization levels, what is required of institutions and what process must be followed. The University leadership replied with an email stating they had decided to not pursue a move from Colorado at this time.

1. **STAFF ANALYSIS**

Under the Degree Authorization Act (§23-2-101 et seq. C.R.S.), authorized institutions are subject to CCHE Policy, Section I, Part J. Aspen University is an authorized institution in Colorado and recently has established a state authorized campus in Phoenix, Arizona. Under the policy, institutions are required to notify Department Staff related to an action by the institution’s accrediting body.

Per CCHE Policy, Section I, Part J, 13.06: “A private college or university shall notify the Department in a timely manner of any material information related to an action by the institution’s accrediting body concerning the institution’s accreditation status, including but not limited to reaffirmation or loss of accreditation, approval of a request for change, a campus evaluation visit, a focused visit, or approval of additional locations. In addition, the institution shall notify the Department in a timely manner if the United States Department of Education, or CHEA, if applicable, no longer recognizes the institution’s accrediting body. Failure to provide this information shall lead to revocation or probationary authorization by the Commission.”

Department staff learned, through its own inquiries and searches, Aspen University applied for a change of location with the Distance Education Accreditation Commission (DEAC) in May 2021, to move its primary administrative functions and academic oversight from Denver, CO to Phoenix, AZ. In June 2021, DEAC granted approval for the University to proceed with the change of location and the University finalized its change of location in October 2021. At the Arizona location, a post-approval visit took place in November 2021 as the final task of changing its primary location from Colorado to Arizona.

The lack of notice to Department staff violates CCHE Policy, Section I, Part J, 13.06 and pursuant to the policy, the “failure to provide this information shall lead to revocation or probationary authorization by the Commission.”

1. **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Staff recommends the Commission change the authorization for Aspen University from Full Authorization to Probationary in Colorado.**

1. **STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

§ 23-2-103.3. Authorization to operate in Colorado – renewal

(2) To operate in Colorado, a private college or university shall be institutionally accredited on the basis of an on-site review by a regional or national accrediting body recognized by the United States department of education; except that a private college or university may operate for an initial period without accreditation if the commission determines, in accordance with standards established by the commission, that the private college or university is likely to become accredited in a reasonable period of time or is making progress toward accreditation in accordance with the accrediting body's policies. The commission may grant a provisional authorization to a private college or university to operate for an initial period without accreditation. The private college or university shall annually renew its provisional authorization and report annually to the commission concerning the institution's progress in obtaining accreditation.

§ 23-2-103.4. Authorization - revocation - probationary status

(2) With regard to the authorization of a private college or university, the commission may:

(a) Revoke the private college's or university's authorization or place the institution on probationary status if the private college or university:

(I) Fails to meet any of the minimum standards set forth in this article or in the commission's policies or rules adopted to implement this article.