

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

http://chronicle.com/daily/2007/07/2007070203n.htm

Today's News

Monday, July 2, 2007

Gallaudet U. Is Placed on Probation by Accreditor

By [KARIN FISCHER](#)

Gallaudet University has been placed on probation by its accreditor, an indication that serious problems persist at the nation's only liberal-arts university for the deaf.

Still, months after protests roiled the university's Washington campus, some Gallaudet students and alumni say the sanctions, announced late Friday, actually may be a blessing in disguise.

"I was, in truth, glad of it, because Gallaudet is long overdue in moving in the right direction," said Ryan K. Commerson, a master's-degree student in cultural studies and one of the leaders of last year's demonstrations against the appointment of Jane K. Fernandes as president, a move that Gallaudet's Board of Trustees subsequently reversed ([The Chronicle](#), November 10, 2006).

"The action," Mr. Commerson said in an interview on Sunday, "is helping us refocus our priorities."

Another student leader, Leah Katz-Hernandez, a junior, said that despite the news, there was a "real sense of optimism" on campus.

The decision by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is, nonetheless, a serious blow to Gallaudet, which will have until November 2008 to prove it is in compliance with the accrediting organization's standards for leadership, integrity, and student retention, among other factors. The accrediting group found Gallaudet had problems with eight of its standards.

In the interim, the university will retain accreditation. Losing accreditation would be a serious problem for Gallaudet, which, like other American colleges, must be approved by a recognized accreditor in order for its students to participate in federal financial-aid programs.

In an [open letter](#) posted on the university's Web site, Robert R. Davila, the university's president, and Steven F. Weiner, its brand-new provost, said the decision was "not unanticipated, and in many ways we have been operating under a self-imposed probation."

Indeed, Gallaudet's accreditation had been delayed for months, following demonstrations last year that shut down the campus for days. The protests were sparked by the appointment of Ms. Fernandes, who opponents said was not a strong enough advocate for deaf people and made decisions without adequately consulting others. She was named after I. King Jordan, the university's longtime president, announced he was stepping down.

Mr. Davila and Mr. Weiner, who takes office today, note that the university has already assembled working groups of faculty and staff members and students to raise admissions standards, increase the academic rigor of the college's core curriculum, and rethink the mission of deaf education.

At a news conference on Friday, Mr. Davila said he hoped the accreditation news would not affect enrollment.

The announcement has lit up the blogosphere, where some writers said they hoped it augured change,

others expressed frustration about the long-term direction of the university, and still others said they were fearful about Gallaudet's future.

One blogger, [Mishka Zena](#), wrote, "This doesn't look good. I knew Gallaudet was in a bad shape, but not the extent."

But another, Ricky D. Taylor, who blogs under the name [Ridor](#), titled his entry "Gallaudet Shall Prosper."

"This is not a bad sign, actually," he wrote. "It is time for a change."

July 1, 2007

University for Deaf Is Put on Probation

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, June 30 (AP) — Gallaudet, the nation's only liberal arts university for the deaf, has been put on probation by its accrediting agency, a sign that the campus continues to face problems months after protests last year shut down the school for days.

The university's accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education had been delayed for months, but it was formally put on probation Friday.

"We wanted to avoid that label," said Robert Davila, the university president. But he added that the university may look back on all the events "as a blessing in disguise."

"It gives us an opportunity to change," Mr. Davila said, "and change is good."

Gallaudet remains accredited but faces a November 2008 deadline to prove it is in compliance with accrediting standards for leadership, integrity and student retention, among other factors.

The university, long considered a center of deaf culture, has struggled to maintain its enrollment as more deaf children choose mainstream colleges or get implants that allow them to hear.

Gallaudet's enrollment has also dropped since months of bitter protests last year over the appointment of a president who students thought lacked leadership skills. The appointment was revoked.

Stephen Weiner, who starts Monday as provost of the school, said enrollment was bound to drop because higher admissions standards have been adopted to increase academic rigor. Mr. Davila said he hoped the probation would not hurt enrollment any further.

"No school wants to go on probation," said Terry Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education. "But they will deal with it very quickly, I suspect."