

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

January 15, 2020

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We are writing to request information regarding your agency's accreditation of the University of Farmington and other sham universities used by the Department of Homeland Security to entrap international students, charge them with immigration violations, and "create fear in our immigration system."<sup>1</sup>

Numerous reports and recently released court documents have revealed that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created multiple fake universities accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) as part of an entrapment operation targeting foreign students.<sup>2</sup>

This DHS operation is not simply a case of prosecuting students who overstayed their visas or an attempt to identify foreign nationals who intended to abuse the student visa system. Instead, it appears to involve the creation of a fake institution and the entrapment of students who did not intend to violate immigration law, but instead were fooled by DHS into thinking their institution was a legitimate college. ACCSC played a key role in the presentation of legitimacy by publicly listing the fake universities as accredited, which led at least some potential students to believe that they were enrolling in a real university. This scheme raises urgent questions about the integrity and appropriateness of DHS' enforcement activities, and your accrediting agency's complicity in facilitating these questionable actions.

Beginning in 2013, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) set up several fake universities that attracted international students with promises of legitimate academic programs, then charged the students with violating the terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Detroit Free Press, "Emails show how fake university in metro Detroit lured students," Niraj Warikoo, February 11, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/2019/02/11/emails-reveal-how-university-lured-students-fake-farmington-university/2744103002/>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

their visas once the universities were revealed to be frauds.<sup>3</sup> After entering the U.S. with legitimate F-1 visas, these students found that their supposed new university offered no classes, had no instructors, and met none of the promises made in its marketing materials—unfairly harming students seeking a degree from these universities.<sup>4</sup> Reports have detailed these students' attempts to verify the legitimacy of these schools and enroll in classes; instead, they were arrested en masse and faced the possibility of deportation and a lifetime ban from the United States.<sup>5</sup> ACCSC appears to have played an active role in facilitating these entrapment schemes.

In December 2019, more than ninety students were arrested for attending the fake University of Farmington, an institution accredited by your agency.<sup>6</sup> Both the University of Farmington and a previous DHS-created sham university, the University of Northern New Jersey, were listed as accredited institutions on ACCSC's website and touted their accreditations in their promotional materials.<sup>7</sup> According to Mr. McComis, "[u]pon request by the US Department of Homeland Security ACCSC assisted in the operation by listing the school as being accredited by ACCSC."<sup>8</sup> This seal of approval fulfilled the fundamental purpose of all accreditation: assuring potential students that the university they were considering was a legitimate and valuable use of their time and tuition dollars.

As an accreditor, ACCSC is responsible for ensuring that students receive high-quality instruction, that the degrees they earn are meaningful, and that federal financial aid dollars are directed toward legitimate educational purposes. Publicly declaring an institution as accredited while knowing that the institution was a false front that provided absolutely no classes or instruction to its students is an appalling violation of each of these responsibilities. These actions undermine ACCSC's credibility as an accreditor and the legitimacy of the U.S. higher education system as a whole. It is deeply misleading, unfair, and irresponsible to falsify accreditation

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<sup>3</sup> Detroit Free Press, "ICE arrests 90 more students at fake university in Michigan," Niraj Warikoo, November 27, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/11/27/ice-arrested-250-foreign-students-fake-university-metro-detroit/4277686002/>; New York Times, "Students at Fake University Say They Were Collateral Damage in Sting Operation," Liz Robbins, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/nyregion/students-at-fake-university-say-they-were-collateral-damage-in-sting-operation.html>

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post, "ICE set up a fake university, then arrested 250 people granted student visas," Katie Mettler and Antonia Noori Farzan, November 28, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2019/11/27/ice-set-up-fake-university-then-arrested-people-it-gave-student-visas/>

<sup>5</sup> Detroit Free Press, "Emails show how fake university in metro Detroit lured students," Niraj Warikoo, February 11, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/2019/02/11/emails-reveal-how-university-lured-students-fake-farmington-university/2744103002/>; New York Times, "Students at Fake University Say They Were Collateral Damage in Sting Operation," Liz Robbins, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/nyregion/students-at-fake-university-say-they-were-collateral-damage-in-sting-operation.html>

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, "Students at Fake University Say They Were Collateral Damage in Sting Operation," Liz Robbins, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/nyregion/students-at-fake-university-say-they-were-collateral-damage-in-sting-operation.html>; University of Farmington, "Factoids," archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190131064227/https://universityoffarmington.edu/factoids>

<sup>8</sup> New York Times, "Students at Fake University Say They Were Collateral Damage in Sting Operation," Liz Robbins, May 5, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/nyregion/students-at-fake-university-say-they-were-collateral-damage-in-sting-operation.html>; University of Farmington, "Factoids," archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190131064227/https://universityoffarmington.edu/factoids>

information that students can and should use to evaluate their educational options before uprooting their lives and making significant financial investments in their education.

To better understand your agency's role in this alarming entrapment operation, we respectfully request answers to the following questions no later than January 28, 2020.

1. Please provide all communication between your agency and DHS regarding the University of Farmington, the University of Northern New Jersey, or other IHEs initiated by DHS.
2. Please provide all communication between your agency and the Department of Education regarding the University of Farmington, the University of Northern New Jersey, or other IHEs initiated by DHS.
3. What process did ACCSC use to accredit the University of Farmington, the University of Northern New Jersey, or other IHEs initiated by DHS? Did ACCSC conduct any evaluation of programs at these institutions?
4. Did the ACCSC executive committee approve of ACCSC's complicity in this entrapment scheme?
5. Please provide documents sufficient to show how much DHS paid ACCSC for accrediting these institutions and the terms and conditions of the DHS contract.
6. Please describe all oversight activities ACCSC took to evaluate the instruction provided by the University of Farmington, the University of Northern New Jersey, or any other IHEs initiated by DHS, either before or after accreditation.
7. Does your agency currently accredit, claim to accredit, or otherwise have a relationship with any other IHEs that were created or initiated by DHS?
8. Is your agency aware of any other accredited IHEs that were set up by DHS for the purpose of entrapping potential international students?
9. DHS has justified this operation by arguing that some international students knowingly enroll in sham universities in order to obtain student visas.<sup>9</sup> Are you aware of any other accredited universities that market themselves to international students and provide no instruction once the students arrive in the U.S.? If so, please list the universities and the number of students affected.
10. Please provide documents sufficient to show any communication that your agency has provided to students at the University of Farmington, the University of Northern New Jersey, or any other IHE initiated by DHS regarding their immigration status, educational options, or any other topic.

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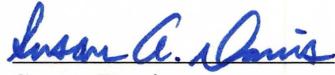
<sup>9</sup> *Washington Post*, "ICE set up a fake university, then arrested 250 people granted student visas," Katie Mettler and Antonia Noori Farzan, November 28, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2019/11/27/ice-set-up-fake-university-then-arrested-people-it-gave-student-visas/>

Sincerely,




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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Susan Davis  
Chair,  
House Subcommittee on  
Higher Education and  
Workforce Investment



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Andy Levin  
Member of Congress