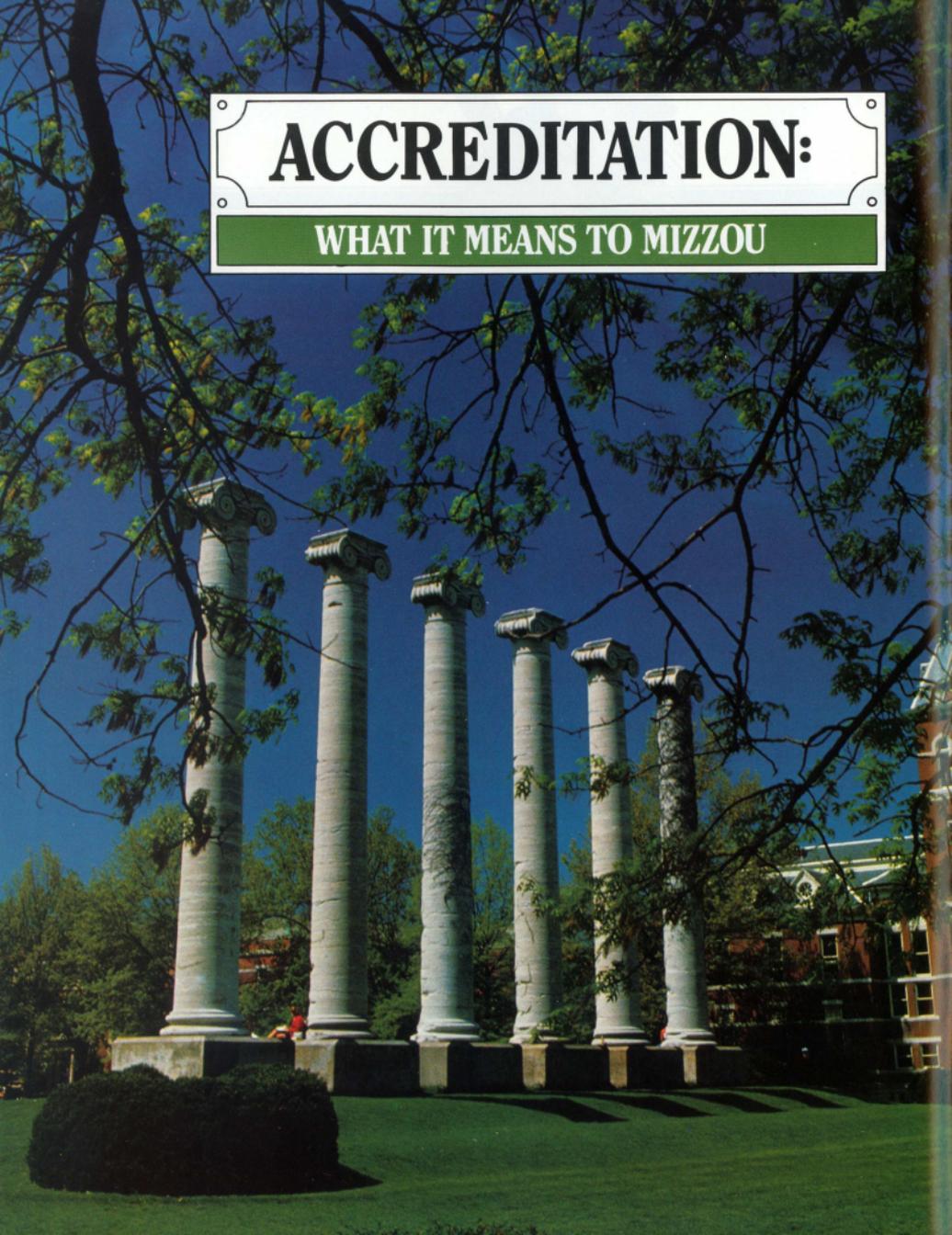


# ACCREDITATION:

WHAT IT MEANS TO MIZZOU



**WITHOUT NEW BUILDINGS** and higher faculty salaries, three Mizzou schools and colleges could lose accreditation.

The threat was underscored in November, when veterinary medicine's accrediting agency dropped the college from full to limited accreditation, which still permits licensure of graduates. The American Veterinary Medical Association criticized finances, equipment, facilities and faculty size.

Accrediting agencies for forestry and law have issued warnings based on similar deficiencies.

But "In no case is the quality of the curriculum and, therefore, the graduate being challenged as being deficient," says Associate Provost Gerald Brouder. "We know we need higher salaries and new buildings, but to threaten loss of accreditation on those grounds is, in my estimation, inconsistent with the central purpose of accreditation."

By definition, Brouder says, accreditation means that a profession or discipline recognizes a program as meeting minimal standards with regard to academic quality. "The purpose of the review should be to ensure that minimum academic standards are being met, and that graduates of those programs are adequately prepared to enter the field they have chosen."

At UMC, all 26 programs eligible for accreditation have their agency's full endorsement, with the exception of veterinary medicine. Accreditation is neither available nor required for the other 200 degree programs.

Program accreditation has no relationship with the Campus-wide accreditation conducted every 10 years by the North Central Association. UMC seems in no danger of losing its Campus-wide accreditation.

Typically, professional organizations serve as accrediting agencies for individual programs. "I think most major universities view the reaccreditation process as being an opportunity to have programs reviewed by objective, outside individuals," Brouder says.

"But more and more," he continues, "universities are becoming disenchanting with the role of accreditation on campus." From his perspective, "I personally don't find useful recommendations that prescribe construction of buildings and minimum levels of faculty

salaries. At major public universities, we cannot simply respond to an accreditation threat by constructing a building. It's not ours to decide, necessarily."

Yet dollars-and-cents issues are among the accrediting teams' criteria. The state's only College of Veterinary Medicine received low marks for "marginal" finances, outdated equipment and facilities, and inadequate faculty salaries and numbers.

In the seven other categories, veterinary medicine was deemed adequate. "The ones we were good in involve things like quality, *esprit de corps*, credibility and honesty," says Dean Robert Kahrs. "There are a lot of things here that money can't buy, such as loyalty and enthusiasm."

But the dean makes a strong case for the college's need for additional funding. An eight-page brochure prepared by the college shows that Mizzou's veterinary medicine budget ranks 24 of 27 schools nationwide. The school's \$4.5 million general operating budget is 64 percent of the national average.

Funding also has jeopardized the accreditation of forestry, which without prescribed improvements in salaries and facilities could lose its endorse-

tion, he says, forestry faculty salaries fall below the Campus average.

The accrediting agency also insists that the school find a central location; it's now spread among five buildings.

As for educational quality, Duncan says, the accrediting team was "very complimentary." Mizzou's Forestry School was rated seventh of 51 in the 1983-84 Gourman Report, which evaluates undergraduate programs.

Accreditation problems for the Law School also hinge on facilities and faculty salaries, which are considered below par by the American Bar Association Section on Legal Education. Loss of accreditation would prevent graduates from taking the Missouri Bar Examination.

**THE LAW LIBRARY** presents the most serious obstacle, says Dean Dale Whitman, because of limited seating and shelf space. "The library is the largest research law library owned by the state of Missouri," Whitman says. "It is a resource for this campus, other campuses, state agencies and the State Supreme Court."

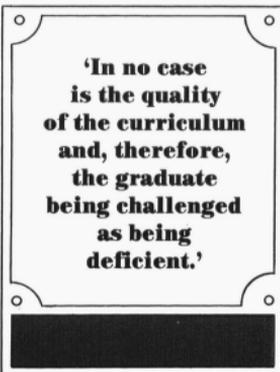
Configuration of classrooms also poses problems, the dean says. "In the class I teach, there are half a dozen students who can't see the blackboard.

"But it's certainly not a situation where I'd say students are not getting a good education—they are—but it does impair the program." Mizzou law graduates consistently lead the state in passage rate on the Missouri Bar Examination. UMC's success rate in July 1984 was 90.55 percent, 10 percent higher than the overall rate.

The irony of quality educational programs being threatened with disaccreditation is of concern to Associate Provost Brouder.

"Accreditation in some cases is used as a lever to bring about change not central to the quality of curriculum," he says. "[Accrediting teams] will say professors can't do work and students can't study in the current facility. Where is the evidence? Environment is one factor, but it's only one factor. To threaten accreditation based on one factor not central to the curriculum is, in my estimation, just not appropriate for accrediting agencies."

Provost Ron Bunn shares Brouder's concern. "As many universities exper-



ment next year. The Society of American Foresters placed the school on probation in 1980. Accreditation of the school's fisheries and wildlife components is not affected.

Faculty salaries in the state's only Forestry School are lowest of the discipline in Big Eight/Big Ten institutions, says Director Donald Duncan. In addi-



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ience financial problems, accrediting agencies sometimes deliberately are taking on the role of interest group for their particular field. Whether loss of accreditation is actually threatened, some special pleading is going on."

If administrators only respond to areas facing accreditation problems, Bunn adds, the majority of Campus programs would be overlooked because they lack accrediting agencies. "You

**'We need to make our case well-known to the state legislature. . . . We need to do as much as we can to raise private funds.'**

have to be very careful not to be captive of their arguments," he warns. "You don't accept on first blush everything told you by accrediting associations."

The provost and Dean Kahrs plan to sit down with veterinary medicine's accrediting agency this spring to review the team's evaluation and the school's progress. "It is an exchange of information," Bunn explains. "We're not appealing the decision." University President C. Peter Magrath and Dean Whitman will report the Law School's progress during a May meeting with the American Bar Association.

Maintaining a variety of information sources, including internal reviews, helps administrators to be realistic about program evaluations, Bunn says. "You cannot give all resources to one program just because an accrediting agency says so.

"But to lose accreditation even if you don't believe it is justified is a blow. Even though the quality of education has not declined, for an accrediting association to say a program is no longer creditable is a black mark on the program."

At best, disaccreditation hampers recruitment of students and faculty. At worst, graduates of professional schools lose their opportunity to be licensed. "So there are very serious consequences from loss of accreditation, and you don't tempt it," the provost says.

Indeed, Funds to improve forestry faculty salaries are forthcoming, Director Duncan says. He also is hopeful of receiving funds for facilities. "I think the accreditation report has helped, particularly on salaries," he says.

The funding outlook also is bright for law and veterinary medicine. Leaders in the Missouri Senate have proposed using some state surplus funds to help finance a \$17 million UMC law building. The school had raised \$1.75 million in private gifts toward its \$2 million commitment to the project.

The University's 1985-86 budget request includes a \$971,000 proposed annual increase for veterinary medicine. Though pleased with the prospect of additional funding, Kahrs cautions against false optimism. "I think it should be known that veterinary medicine is just the tip of the iceberg. The total Campus and University have a lot of other groups probably very close to where we are. You can't have strength in one area and not in others."

**IT'S POSSIBLE** that more UMC programs could face accreditation problems in the next decade, says Chancellor Barbara S. Uehling. "Obviously, we need to make our case well-known to the state legislature. We need to do as much as we can to raise private funds and seek support from outside grants and contracts, and to continue to manage our resources wisely. We also need to have a plan for the future that guides our expenditure pattern and helps us focus on particular areas."

Brouder also emphasizes the importance of long-range planning. "The ability to convince those who really hold the purse strings that we are not simply wanting more money to get bigger, but instead to get better, will prevent our having to visit and revisit negative issues, such as threats to accreditation," he says. "We ought to be obtaining from the legislative funds for programs based upon their merits, so that sound academic offerings can be slated for additional resources." □