November 8, 2012

Mr. Michael Reilly  
Executive Director  
AACRAO  
One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 520  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. Reilly,

We write to formally request the opportunity to participate in AACRAO’s consultation process over the future operation and governance of the University of Texas at Austin’s SPEEDE EDI gateway server (“Texas Server”).

As you know, on October 31, 2012, University of Texas at Austin announced a 12-month feasibility study with the National Student Clearinghouse to assess the technical, operational, financial and policy considerations involved in transferring the operation of the Texas Server. Given its history developing and promoting SPEEDE, our understanding is that AACRAO has been invited to participate in that feasibility study.

As electronic student records continue to grow in adoption, and robust exchange networks operated by non-profit and for-profit organizations continue to evolve, we believe the transfer of the Texas Server represents an important milestone and opportunity in the evolution of SPEEDE. It is critical that the Texas Server not only remain free and open (technically and by perception), but that it is also governed using clear, community-developed and maintained policies and procedures that ensure its continued benefit to all.

For these reasons, we believe that the Texas Server should be managed under the auspices of a non-profit consortia comprised of the major electronic student record networks, academic institutions, associations like AACRAO and PESC and other interested stakeholders. To that end, we announced our support for such a consortia approach (dubbed OpenSPEEDE). We represent thousands of schools and universities that rely on our Avow, Docufide and TranscriptPlus exchange networks. And while competitors, we share a common view that a non-profit consortium that reflects the entire community’s interests should maintain the SPEEDE EDI gateway.
While we appreciate the National Student Clearinghouse’s non-profit status and the sincerity of its commitment to operate the Texas Server, we feel strongly that the unilateral transfer of the Server to the Clearinghouse falls short of the open, collaborative governance and operating model just described. First, the Clearinghouse has chosen to be a vendor in the e-Transcript market, which runs counter to the principle of network-independence. Second, the Clearinghouse has announced its intent to store data that flows through the Texas Server in an education record repository for research purposes, which runs counter to the principle of transparent policies and is inconsistent with the terms of service of networks like ours that interchange through the Server. Third, organizations like ours – despite serving thousands of education organizations – lack any standing with the Clearinghouse and any influence over the policies it applies in its operation of the Texas Server, which runs counter to the principle of open and collaborative governance. Beneficent intent is not a substitute for community governance.

Without a community voice to govern the use and future developments of the Texas Server, networks, both for and non-profit, could be adversely impacted with no recourse. The Clearinghouse is a vital member of any consortia approach. However, the Clearinghouse is not and cannot be the open community governance mechanism that the Texas Server so clearly needs and deserves.

We understand that the University of Texas at Austin is solely responsible for the decision on where the Texas Server will be transferred. We ask that AACRAO, through its role as a consultant in this transition, encourage all interested parties to consider the collaborative approach proposed in this letter. We are ready to roll up our sleeves on behalf of the thousands of colleges that rely on the server and the service providers with which they work.

Sincerely,

Matthew Pittinsky
CEO, Parchment Inc.
Operator of Docufide and Avow

Thomas McKechney
CEO, Credentials Solutions
Operator of Transcript Plus

CC: Rick Torres, CEO and President, National Student Clearinghouse
    Shelby Stanfield, Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Registrar, The University of Texas at Austin