Introduction. There are certain characteristics of mature professions, that is, occupations that have grown, developed and have distinguished themselves from mere occupations. The ASSE Education Standards Committee firmly believes in degree integrity and the professional sovereignty of the safety, health and environmental professions. Many other, well recognized, professions have acted to precisely define their scope of knowledge, their educational requirements and professional credentials (to include certifications and licensing) in order to sanctify their profession from all others. Without such actions, the Education Standards Committee believes that continued erosion in what is and what is not a “safety professional” will continue and the profession itself will never reach its full potential to protect people, property and the environment. Indeed, in many states already, professional engineers who are highly educated and credentialed, but not in safety and health, are given permission to oversee and approve the safety and health of onsite operations. Therefore, it is the position of the ASSE Education Standards Committee (ESC) that to complete its journey to a fully mature, bona fide profession, SHE must accomplish the following:

1. Establish hiring standards and practices for EHS Professionals.

The practice of hiring someone to be the organizational SHE practitioner who has no academic preparation in the specialized body of knowledge must stop. We must develop acceptable and usable professional qualifications for the profession; that is, we must develop hiring standards acceptable to and applied by employers. Only this will create barriers to entry in the field, thus regulating who is and who is not a professional. As a practice, hiring SHE graduates from academic programs without known standards may have been understandable twenty or more years ago when there was only a handful of SHE degree programs with limited number of students. However, that is no longer the case today as evidenced by the ASSE College and University Directory website which identifies 188 degree programs in SHE today in the United States. The most efficient method of accomplishing this objective is to
require specific educational (i.e., academic) credentials in the hiring process just as medicine, law, engineering, nutrition, etc do. In turn, this is best accomplished by program level accreditation.

Indeed, ASSE is already considering the development of these hiring standards and practices through COPA in the guide titled: “Employers’ Guide to hiring a Safety Professional”. The Education Standards Committee feels it is critical that the profession be defined more precisely and that the "Employers' Guide" provides this definition to include the (more typical) core functions, knowledge and skills of SH&E practitioners. Recommendations from the ESC to improve this guide include:

a) The Employers’ Guide should state that there should be a preference to hiring graduates from regionally accredited institutions, and that top preference be given to hiring graduates from programs accredited by either ABET/ASAC or ATMAE.

2. Promote Program Level Accreditation of EHS Programs

The vast majority of EHS Programs are not accredited. In fact, of the 188 EHS programs identified by ASSE College and University Directory, 11 are accredited by the ASAC of ABET, and seven are accredited by ATMAE, (www.atmae.org, 2010). With approximately 90.5% of safety programs not accredited, there are virtually no controls inflicted by the “field” (i.e., the profession) on who is teaching what to students, nor are there any specified program outcomes that all students acquire by virtue of their education. Hence, any program can call itself a safety program, and any graduate can call him or herself a safety professional – a point exacerbated by employers who do not fully understand the safety profession, or the risks safety professionals attempt to mitigate and who ultimately hire personnel from unaccredited programs. ASSE must do a better job promoting the accredited programs and pressuring those programs that are not currently accredited.

2.1. Academic Program Listing. ASSE must recognize that the mere listing of academic SH&E programs on their website is an endorsement by ASSE. In this sense, the Education Standards Committee suggests that they work with ASSE in order to devise criteria for being listed. For example, it is critical that a survey of all schools on this site be completed to determine how
their program outcomes relate to the program outcomes established by the ASSE ESC. The survey can be designed and implemented by the ESC.

Further, the ESC suggests that ASSE should develop and support at least two lists of programs on their website. The first and prominent list should be only those programs that are either ABET/ASAC or ATMAE accredited. The second list should be only those programs that have been screened by the ESC to meet the program outcomes we have established.

3. **Establish occupational closure to separate the qualified from the unqualified.**

Occupational closure allows some degree of demarcation between the qualified and the unqualified in a profession. Those who are not qualified according to the rules and required set of credentials are not considered professionals. For example, in many of the “well established” professions, both education and a professional certification are required. Nutritionists for example are required to come from an ADA accredited academic program to be qualified to enter the required internship; and in turn, a qualified internship is required prior to one taking the registered dietitian (RD) exam; and in turn states require practicing nutritionists to have an RD ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org), 2010). In the near term, occupational closure would tend to reduce the number of practitioners identified as professionals much the way the Flexner Report did in the medical profession (Starr, 1984). Anecdotally, many in SHE professional associations have tended to resist the process of occupational closure. Presumably, since essentially all professional associations are driven by membership dollars, any process that portends to reduce membership, even in the near term such as occupational closure, would logically be resisted as bad for business.

**What follows are several options available to establish occupational closure:**

**Option 1:** Massively increase the percentage of programs that are accredited, and work to establish barriers to entry by unaccredited graduates. Program level accreditation of academic EHS programs (ABET/ASAC or ATMAE) and certifications such as the CSP and CIH can combine to establish some degree of demarcation
between the qualified and the unqualified. ASSE already does recognize members as being "Professional Member" but this really has no meaning or benefit in terms of practice or for those outside the profession such as Human Resources Professionals. This is discussed in the COPA publication “Employers Guide to Hiring a Safety Professional” on page 4. The Education Standards Committee suggests that ASSE might strengthen the Employer’s Guide by stating that they “highly encourage” employers to hire graduates only from accredited degree programs.

**Option 2:** The clearest way to establish occupational closure is professional licensure or regulation. Anecdotally, the authors admit that licensure in the safety and health field remains a controversial topic. However, as a matter of protecting the public health and welfare, and as another mechanism to achieve occupational closure, licensure can be effective and normally carries with it the power of law which helps enforcement. Licensure acts to close a profession from those who have not, or cannot demonstrate the training, education or certifications required for professional practice. For example, from the nursing profession: “Professional licensure requirements assure that the individuals who are granted the authority to practice nursing have demonstrated specified educational, examination and behavioral requirements” ([www.nsbn.org](http://www.nsbn.org), 2010). Interestingly, ASSE commissioned a study (also known as the “Knapp Report”) in 2003 which identified criteria for regulating, or licensing, a profession. In the Knapp Report (2003), the following criteria were cited:

1. Does it require specialized training?
2. Does it impact public health, safety and welfare?
3. Does it need the intervention of the state to protect public health, safety and welfare?
4. Is the profession willing to set up criteria for entry into the profession that focuses on public health, safety and welfare?
5. Are the practitioners willing to submit to rules that ensure that they will not engage in rogue practice conduct once they are admitted to practice?

Consideration of the above criteria clearly reveals that the SH&E field fits as a profession worthy of regulation and licensure; but that it needs to move toward and obtain the hallmarks of other established professions. As an example, it should also be noted that the International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner
Organizations (INSHPO) is currently pursuing international licensure as a vehicle to recognize bona fide practitioners who work across national boundaries in Europe (http://www.inshpo.org/, 2010).

The ASSE ESC also recognizes the need to develop a clear Professional Development Path that includes different levels, i.e., Professional level, Managerial level and a Technician level. The professional development path is discussed in the "Employers Guide to Hiring a Safety Professional" and this is critical as it provides a transition to the various levels. Initially, this may require the use of "grandfathering" for those who are already members of the ASSE much like BCSP did when creating the CSP certification.

**Summary.** It will remain difficult, if at all possible for SHE to be recognized as either a mature discipline or a true profession if it fails to modify current hiring practices, fails to achieve occupational closure, and cannot achieve a level of professional regulation such as licensure. In addition, employers and SHE Professional Associations must work more closely with university programs to promote program level accreditation across the vast majority of SHE programs. Further, employers must be willing to not hire candidates who do not possess the appropriate educational credentials and certifications. It will require more professional discipline than has existed previously to identify the qualified (the professionals) from the unqualified (the non professionals). Admittedly, this discipline could result in a short term reduction of the number of "SHE Professionals". But, in the long run, SHE stands to gain from this short term exclusivity, and, more importantly, the nation will profit from it.
References.


