



The State of Accreditation

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Evolution of Regional Accreditation

- Original Stimulus: “What Is a College?”
- Original Focus on Resources and Processes Judged by Peer Evaluators
- Mission-Centered Standards and Review (the “Golden Age”)
- Second GI Bill and the Adoption of the Federal “Gatekeeper” Role
- Mandatory Federal Focus on Student Learning Outcomes





Evolution of Specialized Accreditation

- Original Stimulus: Flexner Report and the Rise of Professional Licensure and Identity
- Steady Proliferation in Numbers to the Current Total of 61 Specialized Accreditors
- Historically More Attention to Student Academic Performance than Regionals, Usually Through Performance on Licensure Examinations
- Specific Attributes of a Graduate to be Assessed (e.g. ABET and AACSB International)





Taking Stock of Regional Accreditation

- Strengths
 - Widely Accepted “Signal” of Quality
 - Opportunity for Self-Improvement
 - Sharing Practices Through Mutual Visitation
- Challenges
 - Providing Information to the Public
 - Consistency Across Reviews
 - “All or Nothing” Outcomes
 - Perceived Inefficiency and Institutional Burden





Time of Considerable Uncertainty for Institutional Accreditation

- All Regionals Being Criticized in Advance of Reauthorization
- At Least One National Being Sanctioned by the Federal Government (ACICS)
- Heavy and Growing Federal Activism as a Result
- Some New Accreditation Players Emerging
 - New Federal Alternative (EQUIP)
 - The Quality Assurance Commons





Accreditation and Learning Assessment

- Assessment “Required” But Reluctance to Actually Sanction Institutions if they Don’t Do It
 - Institutions Free to Choose Learning Goals and Ways to Gather Assessment Evidence
 - Focus on the *Assessment Process*, Less on the Actual Results of Assessment
 - Focus on Institutional Transparency in Reporting the Results of Assessment
 - Trying Constantly to Increase Institutional Capacity
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Prominent National Developments

- Growing Activism on Accreditation with Reauthorization Coming Up
- Lamar Alexander Proposals on Accreditation
- NACIQI Recommendations on Reconsidering the “Triad”
- ACE Task Force Recommendations
- The Reauthorization of 1992 and The National Policy Board for Institutional Accreditation as Models for What is Happening Now





Common Criticisms of Accreditation

- Low Standards for Reaffirmation
- Lack of Consistency of Reviews and the Drawbacks of Under-Capitalization
- Perceived Inefficiencies and High Institutional Burden
- Provides Little Information to the Public





Proposals for Accreditation Reform

- De-Link Accredited Status from Access to Federal Funds (Eliminate Gatekeeping)
- Focus Process Primarily on Teaching and Learning
- Common Language, Standards, Requirements
- Multiple Levels of Accreditation
- Dashboards and Statistical Reporting
- “Risk-Based” Accreditation
- Greater Transparency





Specialized/Programmatic Accreditation More Stable, But New Players

- Emphasis on Student Outcomes and Program Effectiveness Strong and Growing
- Emerging Professional Communities Spawn New Accreditors
 - Fashion Design within AACSB
 - Logistics Planning
 - Accounting?





But Current Accreditation Structure Unlikely to Be Replaced

- Federal Government Currently Gets Quality Assurance for Free Because Institutions and Programs Bear the Cost
- A Scratch-Built Alternative Would be Very Expensive





Some Enduring Issues in Accreditation

- Accountability vs. Improvement
- Minimum vs. Aspirational Standards
- Internal Candor vs. External Credibility
- Peer vs. Expert Judgment
- [And these play out differently for different accreditors...]

