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
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…]