

Can Accreditation Keep Pace With ***CHANGE?***

Eduardo M. Ochoa

President, CSU Monterey Bay

Former Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, USDE

Paul L. Gaston

Trustees Professor, Kent State University

Can Accreditation Keep Pace

Of course!

“Just because a new idea comes up doesn’t mean we should change everything.”

--Belle Wheelan, SACS President, December 2013

No way!

Accreditation “is costly, parasitic, self-perpetuating, and prone to abuse . . . doomed to fail.”

–Richard A. DeMillo, Center for 21st Century Universities, December 2013

A decade of concern (1)

- **2002** ACTA: *Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?*
- **2006** Spellings Report seeks “transformation of accreditation”
- **2007** ACTA: *Why Accreditation Doesn’t Work and What Policymakers Can Do About It*
- **2008** CHEA: *U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance* (Peter Ewell)
- **2009** USDE Inspector General recommends “limiting, suspending, or terminating” the status of the HLC

A decade of concern (2)

- **2010** Center for College Affordability and Productivity: *The Inmates Running the Asylum?*
- **2012** NACIQI report's "alternative recommendations" describe "a broken system"
- **2012** ACE: *Assuring Academic Quality in the 21st Century: Self-regulation in a New Age*
- **2013** President Obama suggests consideration of "an alternative to accreditation"

What are the issues?



The environment has changed

- “A nation goes to college”
- Increased costs—and accountability
- Higher education itself has evolved
 - Different kinds of institutions
 - The “new faculty majority”
 - New technologies
 - New approaches to academic credit
 - New budgeting methods

As accreditation's mandate has expanded...

- Defining “What is a college?”
- Assuring transfer of credits
- Qualifying institutions for federal student assistance
- Promoting institutional and programmatic strengthening
- Requiring greater accountability

... so have concerns about accreditation

- “It’s a ‘You scratch my back’ system.”
- “Specialized accreditation is coercive: ‘Increase this program’s funding or else!’”
- “The costs of accreditation outweigh its benefits.”
- “A protective insistency on confidentiality trumps the public’s right to know.”
- “Some parts of accreditation’s mandate are in competition with other parts.”
- “Trivial differences among accreditors in process and vocabulary confuse the public unnecessarily.”

Accreditation has responded

- Emphasizing quality documented by “accountability loops”
- Reforming process to offer greater efficiency, flexibility
- Creating platforms for encouraging and sharing innovation
- Increasing visibility
- Expanding governance and participation

Sufficiently?

Nothing more
needs to be done?

There are indications to the contrary

- Opinion leaders and the public remain poorly informed and often confused about the accreditation process
- Information needed to compare institutions remains insufficient and opaque
- Many institutions regard accreditation as burdensome rather than helpful
- Affordability has emerged as an urgent issue

For your consideration . . .
some areas that may
deserve further attention

Consensus and alignment

- Which differences among standards, protocols, actions, and vocabularies are meaningful?
- Which should be eliminated in favor of greater public understanding?
- Which should be preserved and explained?

Credibility

What practical reforms could enhance credibility

- Within the accreditor community?
- Between accreditors and the accredited?
- Between accreditors and the USDE?
- Between accreditors and opinion leaders?
- Between accreditation and the public?

Efficiency

What strategies not now in use might preserve (or enhance) quality oversight while reducing its intrusiveness, frequency, and cost?

Agility and creativity

What more might accreditation do to respond to innovation and creativity?

What more might accreditation do to ***anticipate and encourage*** innovation and creativity?

Decisiveness and transparency

- How can accreditation expedite its processes while avoiding any compromise of due process?
- How can accreditation increase the visibility of its processes and results while protecting the objectivity of peer review and honoring necessary assumptions of confidentiality?

A shared vision

Can accreditation assume a lead role in articulating a vision of higher education that is coherent, principled, and forward looking—a vision above all of what 21st century students need?

A starter list to prompt discussion

- Create greater comparability of accrediting standards, procedures, actions, terminology?
- Secure greater transparency regarding actions?
- Increase efficiency to promote cost-savings for institutions and programs?
- Increase flexibility to recognize quality differentials?
- Increase attention to affordability and productivity?
- Accommodate, encourage, and evaluate new approaches to creating and affirming learning?

Advantages remain advantageous

- U.S. higher education accreditation remains independent of federal control
- Peer review offers an economical, collegial, relatively efficient, and knowledgeable approach to institutional and programmatic evaluation
- The structure of accreditation mirrors that of the academy

The question that has been asked:

**Is Accreditation the Best Possible
Form of Quality Assurance for U.S.
Higher Education?**

In theory?

Perhaps not.

In practice

- Higher education accreditation has offered effective, respected, economical and efficient assurance and stimulus for more than a century
- Accreditation has evolved in important ways
- Accreditation continues to evolve

In brief

For more than a century, higher education accreditation has fulfilled a critical, complex mandate—efficiently, economically, and credibly—and has demonstrated the capacity to continue doing so effectively.

Apologies to Winston Churchill

Accreditation in its present form may be the worst possible form of quality assurance—*except of course for all the other forms that might replace it.*

The question that *should be* asked

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DISCUSS