

## Governing Boards Are Integral To Accreditation

*Henry Stoever, President and CEO, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)*

### Accountability, Responsibility and Accreditation

Fiduciary duties and board accountability for accreditation, educational quality and financial viability continue to be topics of conversation among policymakers, accreditors and institutional leaders. As such, I am delighted to have this opportunity to comment on the board's role in accreditation.



Henry Stoever

Governing boards are accountable for everything that happens or fails to happen at an institution or system, including fulfilling an institution's mission, assuring academic quality and financial viability and reviewing and assuring the continued effectiveness of all major policies, practices and programs. Board accountability for these areas cannot be delegated, but responsibility can be. Boards delegate responsibility to presidents and institutional leaders to run day-to-day operations and depend on these individuals and teams to lead and manage their institutions and systems.

Boards can and should delegate responsibilities for shepherding the institution through accreditation processes. However, they remain accountable for those outcomes and are obligated to engage in accreditation processes in appropriate ways. AGB believes that boards need to understand and respect the leadership roles of the chief executive, administration and faculty; acknowledge the importance of accreditation in serving students; and assure that board engagement and awareness are fundamental to their oversight responsibilities. Engaging in accreditation processes provides opportunities for boards to have meaningful discussions about the types of accreditations held; mission-academic program alignment; priorities and resource-allocation; and how the accreditation report can aid institutional planning. Self-study reports and the results of accreditation processes provide important data on strengths and weaknesses and can inform or require board action. Outcomes of related conversations can reinforce an institution's commitment to its mission and institutional effectiveness. Institutional accreditation processes also provide an occasion for the board to examine, assess and improve its own performance.



### Standards for Board Governance

Since boards oversee issues and determine policies that are critical to the integrity and success of their institutions, it is critically important that accreditors maintain standards for board governance. If an institution falls short or fails, it is the governing board that is accountable. In September 2019, AGB sent a [letter](#) to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), the

committee that advises the U.S. Secretary of Education on the federal oversight of accrediting organizations, asserting the importance of maintaining standards for board governance as part of institutional accreditation reviews. Some of these standards include assuring that the institution's mission is kept current; assuring the financial health and sustainability of the institution; reviewing and strengthening educational quality; selecting and regularly evaluating the institution's president; empowering the president to manage the institution; and focusing on oversight rather than management. Governance standards also include engaging in board performance assessment, defining and addressing conflicts of interest, safeguarding the board's independence from undue influence and working effectively within clear governance policies and practices.

Specific standards differ across accreditors, but they are all intended to broadly assure that boards are fulfilling essential aspects of their fiduciary responsibilities related to institutional governance. Failing to meet such standards usually indicates a larger issue that will ultimately impact the institution's effectiveness and potentially jeopardize the long-term success of the institution or system.

## **Boards are Indispensable Partners**

There is no doubt that conversations among policymakers, accreditors and institutional leaders about the role of boards in accreditation will continue. No matter where these discussions lead, boards will remain accountable for accreditation, educational quality and financial viability. Boards cannot be overlooked and they cannot be removed from the process. They are indispensable strategic partners to advance student success and institutional vitality.

*(The views and opinions expressed in this Op-Ed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.)*

---

**“Boards are  
indispensable  
strategic  
partners to  
advance  
student success  
and  
institutional  
vitality.”**

---

Copyright 2020. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. All rights reserved.

One Dupont Circle, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: 202-955-6126 Fax: 202-955-6129