

Accreditation on the Edge

Council on Higher Education Accreditation

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Setting the context

- No one is happy with accreditation
 - Institutions feel burdened
 - Policy makers are frustrated
 - Consumers are unprotected
 - Employer needs are unmet
 - Accreditors are under fire
- Multiple ways of understanding accreditation
- Accreditation long been debated: now seems to be different
 - New providers, new technologies
 - interest in outcomes and accountability/ROI

Accreditation “on the edge”

- Edge = precipice and Edge = frontier
- How we got here matters
 - Emerged to meet a particular need at a particular time
 - Evolved in response to other needs
- Note to accreditation community: this may not be your fault, but it is definitely your problem
- Accreditation is a Jenga game – moving one piece can destabilize the whole thing
- Many separate conversations underway regarding “the problem”

Mapping the debate

- What is “the problem”?
- What “solutions” are proposed?
- Where are points of agreement?
- Where do perspectives diverge?

- In sum:
 - Where are we in accreditation, how did we get here, and where do we need to go next?

To begin . . .

Judith S. Eaton

- *Foreword: New-Normal Accreditation: Role, Practice, and Values*

Perspectives of Accreditors

Sylvia Manning

- *Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement: Why and How Accreditation Works*

Leah K. Matthews

- *Change in Higher Education Accreditation: The Perspective of a National Accrerator*

Joseph Vibert

- *The Evolving Context of Quality Assurance: A Perspective from Specialized and Professional Accreditation*

Perspectives of Institutions

Anne Neal and Armand Alacbay

- *Fixing a Broken Accreditation System: How to Bring Quality Assurance into the 21st Century*

Michael B. Horn and Alana Dunagan

- *Innovation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

Paul J. LeBlanc

- *Regulatory Experimentation, Accreditation, and Innovation: EQUIP as a Blueprint for the Future of Higher Education*

Perspectives of Policy Makers

Peter T. Ewell

- *Tensions in the Triad: The Evolution of Institutional Quality Assurance Policy*

David Bergeron

- *Managing Risk to Students and Taxpayers in Federal Financial Aid*

Jamienne S. Studley

- *Accreditors as Policy Leaders: Promoting Transparency, Judgment and Culture Change*

Madeleine F. Green

- *Crossing Borders: Accreditation and Quality Assurance in a Globalized World*

Perspectives of Consumers

Edwin W. Koc

- *The Employer Quest for the Quality College Graduate Recruit*

Mark Schneider and Audrey Peek

- *Accreditation and Return on Investment*

Barmak Nassirian and Thomas L. Harnisch

- *Does Accreditation Protect Students Effectively?*

Critical Issues

- A Complicated and Messy System
- Quality and Outcomes
- Many Missions; Many Masters
- Information as the new frontier
- Innovation

A Complicated and Messy System

- A complicated system
- A messy solution
- How then to approach reform?

Quality and Outcomes

- Is process or outcome still a debate?
- But WHAT is the desired outcome?
- Defined and measured by whom?
- And then there's MEASURING it . . .

Many Masters, Many Missions

- How can accreditation be effective in its regulatory assignment?
- Should higher education continue to be self-regulating via accreditation?
- Can quality improvement, quality assurance, and consumer protection missions coexist?
- What if federal financial aid were not linked to accreditation?
- What if there were more direct federal oversight?
- Is there enough funding to support the many missions?

Information: The New Frontier

Transparency, Relevance, Use, and Accuracy

- How transparent should (can) accreditation be?
- More and better information,
- Information...for what purpose?

Challenges of Innovation

- Can Accreditation Help To Advance Innovation?
- Keeping pace With Change in Higher Education
- Is “New” Always Good?

How, then, to approach accreditation reform?

- Needed: a process that considers carefully each of the critical issues.
 - No precipitous jenga movements.
 - Seek agreement about causes
- Seek consensus about the definition and measurement of quality.
 - No lamppost solutions.
- Consider the value and uses of information.
 - Not just information for its own sake.
- Figure out how to give “innovation” a more clear pathway.
 - And ensure that what is new is also quality.
- Consider what is accreditation is FOR.
 - And give other missions to other entities.

The goal? A system that ...

- Is trustable and trusted
- Catches the bad actors
- Helps those who falter improve
- Makes room for new models and methods
- Makes best use of the peer- and disciplinary expert review process
- Respects the uniqueness of institutional mission and also the common mission of higher education in the US
- Encourages institutions to stay on their toes (but not necessarily listen to the same beat nor dance in the same way)
- Recognizes and incorporates the increasingly global realities of higher education
- Provides the public with the information about quality that helps people make their education decisions
- Has clear and consistent responsibility and accountability for oversight across federal, state, and accrediting actors
- Recommits us to mission, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy--while redoubling efforts to put student learning at the center of a transparent quality assurance process.

What role should accreditors play
in shaping reform?

1. What role can/should accreditors play in shaping reform?
2. What value does Title IV functions provide to accreditation? What would be lost if those obligations removed?
3. What would it take to have "improvement," "compliance" and "consumer protection" all part of the accreditor's job?
4. How can a voluntary system work in circumstances where accreditation is undertaken only as essential to market viability? (aka, what would this look like if we stopped pretending this is voluntary?)
5. What would you add to our list of how to approach accreditation reform?