

Assessing and Improving Quality: The Strengths and Limitations of Accreditation

AIRUM
Bloomington, MN
October 27, 2011

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Accreditation focuses on Quality

"Serving the public good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning."

Improvement ← → Assurance

Accreditation on a Continuum

Institutions ← 1950 1992 2011 → US Department of Education

Future?

An accredited institution must graduate the students it admits within 150% of the "normal" time for the student's program and at a rate higher than one-half standard deviation above the mean graduation rate for similar programs at other institutions.

Students completing programs of study that specifically prepare them for work must secure employment in jobs that make direct use of their academic preparation, and do so within six months of graduating.

Six months after graduating, students must be earning monthly salaries that are at least ten times their minimum monthly student financial aid payment (i.e., their minimum payment cannot be more than 10% of their wages).

Strengths of accreditation

Accreditation has provided an occasion where everyone connected with an institution asks themselves collectively:

- What are our purposes for existing?
- Are we doing the right things to achieve our purposes?
- Are we doing those things well?

Strengths of accreditation

Founded on assumptions of trust, good intentions, altruism.

Higher education institutions will “do the right thing” instinctively, and without much need for external pressure.

Broad-brush expectations, avoidance of arbitrary specifics and details.

Strengths of accreditation

Enormous *flexibility* in the evidence an institution an institution provides to answer those questions.

Relatively little prescriptiveness in how institutions must operate.

Expectations devised and applied by peers from the same *community of practice*.

Strengths of accreditation

Measures institutions against their purposes and missions.

Allows for a wide diversity of institutions offering different services and programs serving different stakeholders.

Recognizes that “One size fits all” ignores or obliterates important distinctions.

Strengths of accreditation

Leans over backwards to avoid *false negative* judgments that an effective institution *does not* meet accreditation requirements.

Liable to makes *false positive* judgments that an ineffective institution *does* meet accreditation requirements.

Provides elaborate due process requirements to avoid false negative judgments.

Strengths of accreditation

Sees an institution’s operation of effective systems as evidence of its ability to continue to thrive into the future.

Assumes stability and continuity of current operations will guarantee sustained quality.

Allows different definitions of quality, and embraces institutions with different levels of quality.

Weaknesses of accreditation

Conflates and confuses excellence, quality, measurement, data collection, criteria, standards, inputs, resources, and outputs, performance, and outcomes.

Avoids comparisons between and among institutions.

Fails to clearly identify or grade institutions on quality standards meaningful to the public.

Weaknesses of accreditation

Developed for situations and circumstances that have changed radically:

- Non-dynamic, slow-changing enterprise
- Altruistic, nonprofit, non-competitive
- Selective, with demand exceeding supply
- High levels of public trust and respect
- Narrow, elite clientele

Weaknesses of accreditation

Avoids or de-emphasizes what the academic establishment is reluctant to examine:

- Costs (up 8.3% to \$17,000 average)
- Productivity (graduation)
- Attainment (learning)
- Time
- Value

Accreditation's Record

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of opportunity • Diversity of choices • Heightened perception of importance of higher education • Permitted change and innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little improvement in productivity or attainment • No reduction or containment of costs • Negative perceptions of changes in value • Skepticism about self-regulation

What your institution gets from accreditation?

Improved Effectiveness ← Inner-directed Outer-directed → Reputation & Prestige

IR: Don't let accreditation dictate your agenda

Measure what matters for *you*, analyze the data, and use it to drive *your* decisions.

Gather information on the pressing issues that accreditation avoids.

Think though *transparency* carefully, and do what makes sense from multiple perspectives.

Help run your institution well, and accreditation will take care of itself.

Segment your Students by Purpose for Enrolling

Job skills
 Credential (certificate, diploma, degree)
 Transfer to another institution
 Personal enrichment
 Other (specify)

Segment by Goals for credentials (at this Institution) and/or transfer elsewhere

1. Earned credential, no transfer
2. Earned credential, transfer to a 4-year institution
3. Earned credential, transfer to a different 2-year institution
4. Earned credential, other transfer
5. No earned credential, no transfer
6. No earned credential, transfer to a 4-year institution
7. No earned credential, transfer to a different 2-year institution
8. No earned credential, other transfer

AQIP Completion Worksheet	STUDENT OUTCOMES							
	EARNED CREDENTIAL				NO EARNED CREDENTIAL			
INTENTIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLEES	Earned credential, no transfer	Earned credential, transfer to a 4-year institution	Earned credential, transfer to a different 2-year institution	Earned credential, other transfer	No earned credential, no transfer	No earned credential, transfer to a 4-year institution	No earned credential, transfer to a different 2-year institution	No earned credential, other transfer
Goals for credentials (at this institution) and/or transfer elsewhere								
Purpose for enrolling								

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