

Introducing Quality through Program Accreditation: A Necessary Evil?

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Agenda

- The role of accreditation in higher education and public administration
- The European experience
- The U.S. experience
- Advantages & disadvantages of accreditation
 - Faculty perspective
 - Student perspective
 - Administrative perspective
- Discussion

Role of Accreditation

- Voluntary process of self-regulation and peer review
- Objective is to ensure and promote quality assurance
- Being accountable to the public for student achievement (CHEA, 2010)
- Is the university/institution doing what they say they are doing based on their mission/goals?

Accreditation in Public Administration

- Related to public service ideals
- Focuses on program's mission
- Based on degree programs, not institutions
 - Public management, public administration, public policy, public affairs

European Model

- The European experience is mixed :
- Legal Clusters (Greece, Italy and a number of Eastern European states)
- Public Cluster (France, Spain)
- Corporate Cluster (UK, and most of the former Eastern European states)

(Hajnal 2015)

European Model

- The differences over content also raise the issues of who determines the curriculum and who defines the discipline / subject fields
- Points of conflict or discussion : Are we modelling ideas of accountability and public service which require working with and listening to users and stakeholders?
- Points of conflict or discussion : Are we creating accreditation and validation systems which are designed to meet the needs of users and providers ?
- Points of conflict or discussion : Is there a subject field / discipline?
- Points of conflict or discussion: Validation / Accreditation as 'confirmation' or regulation ?

U.S. Model: Types of accreditation

- United States Department of Education (USDE)
 - Public organization that provides recognition at the institutional level
 - Focus is on ensuring federal student aid funds are being used in quality programs
- Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
 - “Accredits the accreditors” (not public)
 - Recognition by CHEA requires an accrediting organization to:
 - Exhibit accountability
 - Advance academic quality
 - Have a structured, continuing review of their accreditation process

CHEA

- Governed by a 20-person board of college and university presidents, institutional representatives and public members
- Accreditation by CHEA is for 10 years
- Requires extensive self-study, review by outside reviewers and oral presentation
- Types of accreditors:
 - Regional (6)
 - National faith-based (4)
 - National career-related (2)
 - Programmatic (49)

Network of Association of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs & Administration (NASPAA)

- Founded in 1970 as satellite of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)
 - 1977 adopted voluntary peer review of masters degrees in public affairs & administration
- Received recognition from the CHEA in 2003
 - Re-accredited May 2014 for 10 more years
- 280 members in US
 - International membership (11 countries)
- 179 accredited degree programs at 168 schools
 - Represents 60 percent of NASPAA members
- Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) is NASPAA's accrediting body
 - Last summer COPRA accredited a program outside the US for the first time (China)

COPRA

- Programs looking for accreditation or reaccreditation report their compliance with seven Standards (indicate quality)
 - Programs mission
 - Faculty performance
 - Student services
 - Resources
 - Communications
 - Management
 - Student learning
- Begins with program self-study, review by COPRA and site visit (peer reviewed)

COPRA FEES

- National membership dues in addition to accreditation costs (accreditation fees & site visitor fees)
- Base Fee:
 - Eligibility phase:\$1,033
 - Initial Accreditation:\$5,620
 - Reaccreditation (every 7 years):.....\$4,587
- Additional supplemental costs (multi-campus, more than one modality, distance campus outside US, etc.)
- Annual Fees for Accredited Programs
 - Programs with 100 Students or less: \$393
 - Programs with more than 100 Students:..... \$599

Issues in Accreditation:

Transparency and accountability

- Transparency in terms of the process of accreditation
 - “The irony of the public service accreditor having one of the most secretive accreditation processes was so noted by CHEA in NASPAA’s last recognition review” (McFarland, 2007)
- Has resulted in more openness into the process, accessibility of self-study reports from accredited programs (voluntary basis)

Issues in Accreditation: Transparency and accountability

- Accountability:
 - As demonstrated through assessment of student learning outcomes
- Increased emphasis from government (USDE)
- Defined by CHEA (2006):
 - An “outcome” is something that happens to an individual student as a result of his or her attendance at a higher education institution or participation in a particular course of study...A “student learning outcome,” in contrast, is properly defined in terms of the particular levels of knowledge, skills and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of collegiate experiences.”

Advantages of Accreditation

- Faculty:
 - Reputation
 - Emphasis on quality in teaching/research
- Student:
 - Improved quality of services
 - Increased accountability
- Administration:
 - Improved organizational quality
 - Increased public confidence in the services provided
 - Marketing opportunities

Disadvantages of Accreditation

- Faculty:
 - Emphasis on student learning outcomes (change in direction?)
 - Self-study and annual reporting requirements
- Student:
 - Changes in program delivery due to reporting requirements
- Administration:
 - Cost of accreditation/reaccreditation
 - Reporting requirements
 - Impact on those institutions not seeking accreditation

Discussion

Key Questions :

- Do we need to reflect on the 'age of austerity' in terms of how we make sense of accreditation systems and processes ?
- Do we have a shared definition of what constitutes the PA field or discipline ?
- Do we have a shared understanding of how accreditation impacts on (or is impacted by) notions of accountability, transparency and comparability ?

Discussion