The Evaluation and Accreditation of Post-Graduate Programs in the United States
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PURPOSE OF ACCREDITATION

- Set Standards of Quality for all Universities
- Provide the Public a Mechanism for Assurance of the Quality of a University
- Develop a Continuous Improvement Process for Higher Education
- A Mechanism to Share Best Practices
- Criterion for Qualifying for Federal Programs
  - Student Aid
  - Grants and Contracts
CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCREDITATION

- Voluntary participation; an earned and renewable status
  - Institution must prove it meets the standards
- Peer developed and review process
- Requires institutional commitment to student learning and achievement outcomes
- Commitment to quality improvement and continuous assessment
- Self-regulation of higher education system of universities
- Rigorous adherence to standards for all programs
STRUCTURE OF ACCREDITATION ORGANIZATIONS IN THE U.S.

- National Accreditation Agencies
  - Accredit specific types of institutions wherever they are located
- Regional Accreditation Agencies
  - Accredit institutions of higher education in regions of country
    - Why regional – large country with over 3,000 universities
- Professional/Specialized Accreditation Agencies
  - Accredit specific programs within a university
    - Requires Regional Accreditation to be considered
- Non-Governmental Organizations
- Voluntary Compliance
All Accreditation Agencies must be approved by the U.S. Department of Education

Department of Education does not perform accreditation assessments

A public body, National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) advises Department of Education

NACIQI members nominated by U.S. Senators and Representatives

NACIQI recommends which agencies are authorized to conduct accreditation activities
NATIONAL AGENCIES

- For institutions with specific missions such as:
  - Bible Colleges
  - Theological Schools
  - Continuing Education and Training
  - Career Schools and Colleges of Technology
  - Health Education Schools
- Usually private and for-profit colleges
REGIONAL ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

- NEASC
- NCACS
- MSACS
- NWCCU
- SACS
- WASC

United States map with regions and accrediting agencies.
REGIONAL ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

- Each region has its own organization
- Accredits Elementary, Secondary, and Higher Education schools
- Separate system for each level (Commission on Colleges for Higher Education)
- Member institutions are those who have attained accreditation
- President (Rector) of each member has one vote on issues of accreditation
NUMBER OF COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES ACCREDITED

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) – 804
- North Central - ~1000
- Middle States – 515
- Western - ~350
- New England – 236
- Northwest – 156
SACS ACCREDITATION


- Section 1: The Principles of Integrity
- Section 2: Core Requirements
- Section 3: Comprehensive Standards
- Section 4: Federal Requirements

- Must meet requirements for membership in SACS (accreditation)
- Requirements developed by member institutions
LEVELS OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

- Level depends on the highest degree offered
  - Level I: Associate degree
  - Level II: Baccalaureate degree
  - Level III: Master’s degree
  - Level IV: Specialist degree
  - Level V: 3 or fewer doctorate degrees
  - Level VI: 4 or more doctorate degrees

- Changing levels requires a “Substantive Change” report and review
ACCREDITATION PROCESS

- Application for membership
  - Requires an extensive report on each part of the criteria
    - Compliance with Core Requirements
    - Faculty qualifications
    - Compliance with Comprehensive Standards
    - Compliance with Federal Requirements
- Site visit to university by SACS team
- Report by SACS team and recommendation
- Vote by SACS membership
TERM OF ACCREDITATION

- First time – 5 Years
- Reaffirmation – 10 years
  - May require an interim report usually 5 years
- Not meeting criteria – probation
- Remove accreditation (membership)
POST-BACCALAUREATE ACCREDITATION

- Integral part of Regional Accreditation
- Depends on Level of Accreditation
- Must involve progressively more advanced academic content
- Students must have knowledge of literature in discipline
- Student engage in research and/or appropriate professional practice
PROFESSIONAL/SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

- Dentistry – American Dental Association (ADA)
- Legal Education – American Bar Association (ABA)
- Architecture – National Architectural Accrediting Board
- Business – Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)
- Engineering – Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)
Teacher Education
- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
- Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)

Music – National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)

Nursing
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE)
- National League of Nursing Accreditation Council (NLNAC)

Many more…
PROFESSIONAL/SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

- Agency must be recognized by U.S. Department of Education and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- The Agency’s governing board from both the higher education institutions and other professional in the field of study
- Standards established by each authorized Agency
PROFESSIONAL/SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

- Each Professional/Specialized Accreditation Agency develops its own criteria for accreditation
- Many similarities
  - Objectives are quality assurance of higher education institution
  - Must incorporate mechanisms for continuous improvement
  - Evaluate ability of program to offer high quality degrees:
• Characteristics of the curriculum – meets the needs of the profession
• Qualifications of the faculty – advanced degrees, professional experience
• Resources available to operate the program – operating funds, new equipment, faculty and staff salaries
• Facilities needed – laboratories, classrooms, offices
  ○ University support functions – library, computer systems
PROFESSIONAL/SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION LEVELS

- Dependent on the characteristics and needs of the profession
- Most accredit some if not all post-graduate programs
- Nursing
  - NLNAC – mostly Associate degrees (RN); some BS and MS
  - CCNE – only BS, MS and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DPN); no Ph.D.
- Engineering - ABET
  - BS first professional degree – most universities
  - MS first professional degree – a few universities
  - Ph.D. – not done
ACCREDITATION LEVELS (continued)

- Medical – Liaison Committee on Medical Education
  - M.D. only
- Business – AACSB
  - All degree levels including MBA and Ph.D.
Most professional licensing bodies require graduation from an accredited university program

- Licensure is a State not Federal activity
- Most States have reciprocity agreements

Engineering – to take Professional Engineer license examination, must graduate from an ABET accredited university

Medical – to become a licensed Medical Doctor, first must graduate from a medical school accredited by LCME

Architecture, Nursing, Legal,… similar licensure requirements
ABET

- BS is the first professional degree in engineering
- Regional accreditation establishes the overall quality of the program
- Graduate programs are sources of innovation and new information
- Want to encourage experimentation and new approaches both in research and in classroom activities
- Do not want all universities to look alike
SUMMARY – POST-GRADUATE ACCREDITATION

- Self-regulation of higher education system of universities
- University must be Regionally accredited
  - Most important accreditation action
  - Involves all university programs at all degree levels
  - Usually a requirement for professional/specialized accreditation
  - Required for many Federal programs
    - Student aid
    - Research grants and contracts
    - Other Federal aid programs such as equipment and facilities
Professional/Specialized Accreditation in addition to Regional Accreditation

U.S. Department of Education only authorizes Accreditation Agencies
- Does not conduct accreditation evaluations

Accreditation actions by peer groups

Accreditation Agencies non-profit organizations
- Limited staff

Evaluators obtained from professional groups and volunteers – non paid
SUMMARY (continued)

- Voluntary participation by university
  - Institution must prove it meets the standards
  - An earned and renewable status
- Peer developed criteria and review process
- Requires institutional commitment to student learning and achievement outcomes
- A demonstrated system of quality improvement and continuous assessment
- Rigorous adherence to standards for all programs
Thank You!