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

by
Dr. Robert R. Furgason, P.E.
President –Emeritus
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

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1) La Evaluación y acreditación de programas de posgrado en Estados Unidos
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
STRUCTURE OF ACCREDITATION (continued)

- 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

Northwest Region
Western Region
North Central Region
Southern Region
Middle States Region
New England Region

NEASC  NCACS  NWCCU  SACS  WASC
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
"The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement"

- 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)
ACCREDITATION AGENCIES (continued)

- 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
SUMMARY (continued)

- 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
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!