

An Overview of Topics on Accreditation: A Beginning

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Abstract

Reflecting on the very nature of accreditation—and its enormous influence on the work of the academy—is an important activity. We propose that the manuscripts that were selected for publication encompass three major themes. This editorial summarizes those themes and provides some additional perspectives from us, as the editors of the journal.

Keywords

educational administration, leadership, policy, education, social sciences, higher education, accreditation, disciplines, stakeholders

Introduction

As the editors of this special journal, we were presented with a diverse range of papers. While most of the submissions focused on teacher education accreditation, other areas such as business and nursing were also represented. We were pleased that submissions from other disciplines were included in this body of work because they highlight universal interest in the subject. Obviously, accreditation is a hot topic, and the response to the call for papers was met with interest from across disciplines.

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Theme 1: Measuring Outcomes Presents a Significant Challenge

The Dakduk article provides an interesting story about the role of standardized assessments in the admissions process. Admissions is an area of interest across all disciplines for accreditation teams. Dakduk presents a balanced reminder that standardized assessments have a place in the admissions process. In fact, the Graduate Management Admissions Test™ (GMAT), when included with other student-level factors, appears to be a good proxy for gauging success in a business education program.

As most readers will note, there is often a reluctance to use only standardized test results when gauging the worthiness of a candidate's application to a professional program. To that end, Dakduk reminds us that several variables need to be considered relative to applications to professional

programs. These include candidate-specific factors such as work history and other psychological variables (motivation, dispositions, etc.) and possibly demographics. These non-test-based factors have been less studied and thus do not provide consistent enough results for them to be considered as valid predictors of success.

Theme 2: National Accreditation Is Necessary—But Perhaps Lacking Appropriate Significance

As editors, having lived within universities facing challenges with accreditation, we were surprised that no submissions challenged the notions or social underpinnings of the accreditation process. Hasburn came close when identifying that many educator preparation programs (EPPs) may look at national accreditation to provide evidence of rigor and program quality but concluded that the actual individual process is daunting. Turpin actually begins the article with the discussion of sleepless nights and long days preparing for the accreditation site visit. The investigation of external reports focuses more on the process rather than the spotlighted outcomes, resulting in superficial ranking of the reporting bodies. Both articles assume the position that these superficial reviews are just necessary consequences of the accreditation process.

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Theme 3: Much of the Benefit of Accreditation Is Within the Process of Preparing for the Accreditation

As educators often attest, the process is equal to the product. There is a major benefit in bringing faculty teams together to study their programs, their teaching, and their student learning outcomes. Turpin, Colby, Dakduk, Hasburn, and Kaplan all point to this in their work. Although the process may be arduous and possibly contain levels of difficulties to capture measures, Kaplan concluded that there are components of standards in accreditation that have the capability to move the profession forward. Turpin agreed that although the process requires significant work and authentic self-assessment, the process can result in ensuring quality of a program and identification of areas for improvement. Hasburn supported this by indicating that the accreditation process does help programs become more effective. It is clear the work is daunting but can also lead to improvement in programs across the disciplines.

The authors all point out a need for a reduction in the workload of assessment but recognize that it can only occur if programs and procedures are set in place early in the process. Colby indicated there is a need for immediate creation of meaningful assessment systems that support student learning, program quality, and continuous improvement. In addition, Colby also stresses the importance of commitment from administrators, faculty, and professional development to support and strongly adhere to protocol for the assessment system to be its most efficient. When you compliment these procedures with the candidate selection practice addressed by Dakduk, they identify the importance of building a continuum to support the process.

Summary

After synthesizing all the pieces, it is unclear if we answered our original question of how do we leverage the accreditation process for improvement. Each article added insight into the process of accreditation, the need for the measures, and the end results of program development and continuum. What are the takeaway components? We have identified that no matter the school or discipline, the challenge of accreditation and quality of the candidates affects a program and its outcomes. We conclude that the way to successful accreditation is through establishing an effectively maintained assessment system, a culture of accountability and buy-in from all personnel involved.

Turpin, Colby, and Hasburn all stressed the importance of stakeholders in the accreditation process. It takes a “village” to

prepare, develop, and successfully experience an accreditation review, resulting in program development. Of all these relationships, specifically the largest impact appears to be faculty buy-in. Faculty must have an understanding of the process and the standards that are used for evaluation. As indicated by Hasburn, this understanding and buy-in needs to occur early in the process to produce better results. Without collaboration, eminent failure can occur as indicated when Colby reported that the collaborative analysis piece of their accreditation was a struggle due to a lack of faculty investment. So does this process truly fall into the hands of the faculty involved or does the ownership fall to administration or both?

As editors, we are compelled to point out that a gap in the literature around accreditation exists. We, in higher education, seem to be making assumptions about the worthwhile nature of the outcomes associated with accreditation. We point this out because we are deliberately challenging the depth of the literature around accreditation processes and philosophies. There are certainly good reasons to pursue accreditation. However, it seems that researchers are hesitant to challenge this assumption. To assume accreditation’s significance without supporting evidence is against the nature of the academy. And while the intent is not what we are challenging, the process and the need for further research around the process is. But, we feel that this is a good start.

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Greg Sampson has been a classroom teacher, university professor, and educational administrator. He is currently working in the Pacific Northwest as a classroom teacher while he pursues some non-work related life goals.