
AACSB Accreditation: Addressing Faculty Concerns

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Stakeholders in management education are increasingly demanding external validation of learning and quality assurance. In this essay, I contend that, given the rapid increase in the number of universities offering business programs around the world, AACSB accreditation is more important than ever. The goal of this essay is, therefore, to provide accurate information about accreditation issues that impact business faculty and help faculty understand the value of AACSB accreditation to management education. Another goal is to facilitate an open discussion about how AACSB accreditation impacts business schools and perhaps motivate faculty to reconsider their perceptions about it.

The U.S. Department of Education Commission on the Future of Higher Education recently issued its report, which stated: "A framework that aligns and expands existing accreditation standards should be established (i) to allow comparisons among institutions regarding learning outcomes and other performance measures, (ii) to encourage innovation and continuous improvement, and (iii) to require institutions and programs to move towards world-class quality relative to specific missions and report measurable progress in relationship to their national and international peers" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006: 20). AACSB-accredited business schools are committed to being responsive to the Commission's above-mentioned recommendations, and AACSB accreditation processes and products are well suited to support these demands as well. For example, accreditation standards are mission based and encourage innovation and continuous improvements, which results in a variety of quality programs. Additionally, AACSB's business school database, *Data Direct*, is used by schools to compare themselves to other schools around the world and as a benchmark.

Nonetheless, comments in recent articles (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, Trank & Rynes, 2003) reflect confusion about AACSB accreditation. My intention here is to address several issues cited by Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006). The prevalence of what I believe are inaccurate

perceptions can contribute to schools failing to realize the full range of benefits that can accrue from AACSB accreditation. Additionally, if these perceptions are believed to be true, they can lead to inaccurate assessments of problems business schools may be facing. For example, faculty may believe that AACSB standards are preventing them from implementing a program change when in fact the barrier lies elsewhere. As a former management professor, I had many incorrect notions about AACSB accreditation and know that many of my colleagues have similar perceptions.

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Therefore, I will provide an alternative view of AACSB and accurate information about AACSB accreditation and its impact on business schools, not as an attempt to control information or limit discussion about AACSB accreditation, but to provide information that will encourage a healthy debate about AACSB and motivate faculty to explore their perceptions about accreditation.

AACSB FACILITATES PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS SCHOOL STRATEGIES

Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) claim that accreditation standards have a negative effect on strategy. In particular, they suggest that accreditation

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is incongruent with the current rapidly changing environment because it makes schools less likely to adapt strategy in response to changes. According to a survey of 300 deans from 25 countries, factors contributing to change include the faculty shortage, increased competition, reductions in funding, and so forth (Fairbank, Labianca, & LeClair, 2005). While the higher education industry is certainly experiencing much change, AACSB accreditation has a positive, not a negative impact on strategic performance in such an environment. Before proceeding, however, I acknowledge that there is a lack of published, hard, and systematic data on AACSB's positive strategic impact. Nonetheless, I use the best available information to support my position here: anecdotal, empirical, and descriptive data, examples from deans, AACSB studies, AACSB accreditation standards, and published articles.

AACSB strives not to interfere with strategy. In fact, a major role for AACSB is assisting schools in strategic management to facilitate long-term success. Strategic management is one of the three broad categories of accreditation standards (participants and assurance of learning are the other two) and reflects the importance of strategy in successful business schools (see Appendix for all 21 standards). A school's mission statement, the foundation of its strategy, is the basis for determining the appropriate mix of degree programs, faculty resources, student services, and other key functions; therefore, schools make these decisions independently, given broad accreditation guidelines. Information from *DataDirect* (AACSB, 2007), the world's largest business school database, illustrates the variety of accredited business schools reflected by their missions. Table 1 indicates the number of schools categorized into seven mission-emphasis combinations of teaching, intellectual contributions, and service. The variety of missions, and therefore, strategies reflected in Table 1 would be impossible if AACSB impeded strategy.

Strategy has been shown to have a positive ef-

fect on performance (Hopkins & Hopkins, 1997; Miller & Cardinal, 1994; Rogers, Miller, & Judge, 1999). Furthermore, Ireland and Hitt (2005) indicate that strategic leadership is crucial for success in fast-changing environments and is a source of competitive advantage. Numerous elements of their definition of strategic leadership (creating a vision, establishing balanced organizational controls, etc.) are consistent with accreditation expectations. Additionally, Ireland and Hitt's recommendation to remain "focused on the future" (Ireland & Hitt, 2005: 74) is entirely consistent with mission-linked standards and the strategic orientation that AACSB endeavors to foster. Strategic leadership is encouraged by way of the initial accreditation and maintenance processes that evaluate the school's strategy implementation and mission integrity. It is also encouraged through AACSB conferences (e.g., Continuous Improvement Conference); seminars (e.g., Strategic Management Seminar); articles in *BizEd* (e.g., "The Global Footprint") and other products. Overall, AACSB encourages business school administrators to become strategic leaders by motivating them to think long term and develop competitive advantages.

One major competitive advantage that accredited schools enjoy is quality, particularly when compared to competitors that do not have an established reputation. While worldwide demand for quality assurance is common in industry (e.g., TQM, ISO, etc.), it is quite new to universities. Historically, universities were entrusted with teaching students while providing little, if any, evidence of learning outcomes achievement. Recently, the United States Department of Education Commission on the Future of Higher Education was formed, in part, to examine the need for increased accountability and quality in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Similar demands have been made by agencies in other countries such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the U.K. AACSB accreditation helps schools react strategically to key constituents in their external environment by establishing long-term accountability regarding the content of their educational products.

I contend that AACSB accreditation contributes to a school's ability to demonstrate quality in a manner analogous to ISO. King, Lenox, and Terlaak (2005) found that ISO certification provides valuable information about the quality of a firm's management. Firms physically distant from their buyers and firms with foreign buyers are more likely to seek ISO certification. In other words, buyers attach value to certification when they are unable to access the quality of processes at their

TABLE 1
Mission Statement Emphasis

Teaching, Intellectual Contributions, Service	205 (44%)
Intellectual Contributions, Teaching, Service	57 (12%)
Teaching, Service, Intellectual Contributions	2 (<1%)
Intellectual Contributions, Service, Teaching	0
Equal Teaching/Intellectual Contributions, Service	154 (33%)
Teaching, Equal Intellectual Contributions/Service	28 (6%)
Equal Teaching, Intellectual Contributions, Service	17 (4%)
Total	463

Note. This table is based on 2005–2006 data.

suppliers. In effect, they depend on certification to communicate quality. This relationship is similar to that which exists between business schools and students, faculty, employers, governments—all of which can be viewed as consumers of educational products. Buyers of educational products derive value from AACSB accreditation in the form of quality assurance, even though they do not know the intricacies of the accreditation process. For example, Dr. Bob O'Keefe, Head of the School of Management at the University of Surrey, suggests that since securing accreditation, "the school has attracted American expatriates living in the area and accreditation has also helped the school attract more applicants from outside the UK, particularly from Asia." He also proposes that AACSB accreditation demonstrates quality and the brand recognition function it provides the school is valuable, particularly in markets such as India and China (Personal communication, 3/19/2007). In today's global environment, the quality assurance that AACSB accreditation provides is likely to be more valuable than ever. Given the multitude of business schools competing with each other around the world, a well-established brand like AACSB is vital for schools to demonstrate quality and can be a source of competitive advantage.

One particular AACSB-accredited school is a prime example of how quality can be turned into a competitive advantage. The Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business at the University of North Colorado earned the 2004 Baldrige National Quality Award (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2004) following a multiyear implementation of the Baldrige criteria to drive improvement within its programs. Criteria for this award include numerous performance and continuous improvement measures that are congruent with AACSB standards. According to the former dean of the college, Joe Alexander, AACSB helps foster a "quality mentality." He also suggests that there are numerous parallels between AACSB and the Baldrige Award criteria, such as a focus on mission, processes aligned to drive continuous improvement, and a strong emphasis on learning outcomes (Personal communication, 3/8/2007). Marketing itself as the only business school to have earned the Baldrige Award gives Montford a competitive advantage as is the higher quality that results from the award and accreditation processes.

There is also evidence that accreditation is often seen to be a part of a school's improvement strategy. Schools in both the initial accreditation and maintenance of accreditation process benefit from access to AACSB's *DataDirect*. With information from this database, schools can create benchmark-

ing reports containing salary, enrollment, financial, demographic, mission, and other types of data that contribute to strategic improvements. The pre-accreditation mentor or peer review team guide an institution through the accreditation process, much of which is directed toward strategic development. Both accredited schools and those seeking initial accreditation benefit from peer reviews, which provide assistance in strategic development and motivation for improvement. Peer reviews are a form of external quality control and provide valuable ideas for improvement. For example, comments from Dean Edward J. Schoen, from the Rohrer College of Business at Rowan University (personal communication, 3/13/2007), are illustrative of the long-term value that schools derive from AACSB accreditation:

I strongly believe the successful AACSB accreditation effort undertaken by the Rohrer College of Business (COB) has resulted in major improvements. In preparing for accreditation, we reviewed, developed and implemented important processes that continue to keep us focused on continuous improvement. Rowan University significantly increased the financial support provided to the Rohrer COB that enabled us to hire additional faculty and increase faculty development support. Our faculty members have significantly enhanced their scholarly activities, and have gained a greater sense of pride and accomplishment by achieving the accreditation. Likewise, having the accreditation has assisted us in the recruitment of both students and faculty members by providing an external validation of quality. Finally and perhaps most importantly, we successfully developed and implemented an outstanding assessment program through which we can document successful learning outcomes and spotlight program improvement initiatives.

I argue further that AACSB positively influences strategic performance by motivating schools to focus on activities consistent with their mission. AACSB accreditation also facilitates interaction with, and feedback from, other accredited schools. The standards promote continuously improving quality, which can be a major competitive advantage. Last, accreditation encourages strategic leadership, which is perhaps the most important element in superior strategic performance.

AACSB ACCREDITATION ENCOURAGES FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) suggest that adhering to accreditation standards reduces the flexibility of schools reacting to market changes. To the contrary, current AACSB accreditation standards (2007) are flexible by design. Program diversity at AACSB schools is evidence of the innovation fostered by AACSB standards. AACSB accredited schools offer 1,700 different kinds of undergraduate programs and 740 specialized master's programs (e.g., luxury brand management, pharmaeconomics, etc.). Figures 1 and 2 present information from AACSB's *DataDirect*, which indicates the growth in four program categories at the undergraduate and MBA level. The diversity of programs at accredited schools would be impossible if AACSB inhibited flexibility.

In fact, the latest standards (AACSB, 2007) explicitly support more innovation in program delivery and school administration. For example, the standards indicate that "the faculty as a whole should encourage instructional innovation, and administrators should provide professional development opportunities for curricular and course innovation" (AACSB, 2007: 55). Many of the most innovative business schools are AACSB accredited and they are not constrained by AACSB accreditation. Business programs at Case Weatherhead School of Management, Open University, and ESADE are good examples. Case and ESADE are listed in *Beyond the Grey Pinstripes* (Aspen Institute, 2005), which is a listing of schools with progressive curricula in the areas of ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility. Open University has been a leader in distance education and other nontraditional approaches to business educa-

tion. Innovation at these schools and data represented in Figures 1 and 2 are evidence of flexibility and creativity that AACSB accreditation encourages.

Strategy is imperative in a changing environment, in which a consistent direction is essential to long-term success (Andersen, 2000, 2004; Brews & Hunt, 1999; Goll & Rasheed, 1997; Grant, 2003). Successful firms such as General Electric, Dell, Sony, Ericsson, and others in hypercompetitive industries, survive and prosper due in part to their long-term strategies. In addition, these firms have formal strategic management processes that enhance their ability to create effective strategies. While their short-term objectives change based on the dynamic nature of their markets, these firms have relatively consistent strategies.

Hambrick and Fredrickson (2005) also point out that strategy does not have to be static or restrict flexibility, and they cite numerous firms (e.g., IKEA) that have effectively built flexibility into their strategies by making them general enough to fit variable conditions. AACSB accreditation thus supports flexibility because it encourages schools to choose their strategy and change it as necessary. Additionally, the standards specifically recognize multiple approaches to strategy: "Schools may conduct their strategic management activities in many different ways" (AACSB, 2007: 19). Another example of support for flexibility is cited in the standards: "The definition of learning goals must be developed at each member institution to fit characteristics, circumstances, and mission of the institution and its business degree programs" (AACSB, 2007: 64). Last, the guidelines specify that accreditation reviews must account for differences in programs. For example, the standards state that

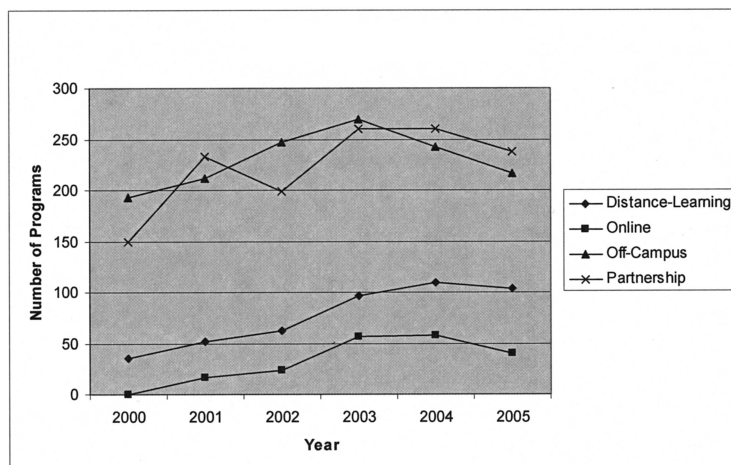


FIGURE 1
Program Growth, UG

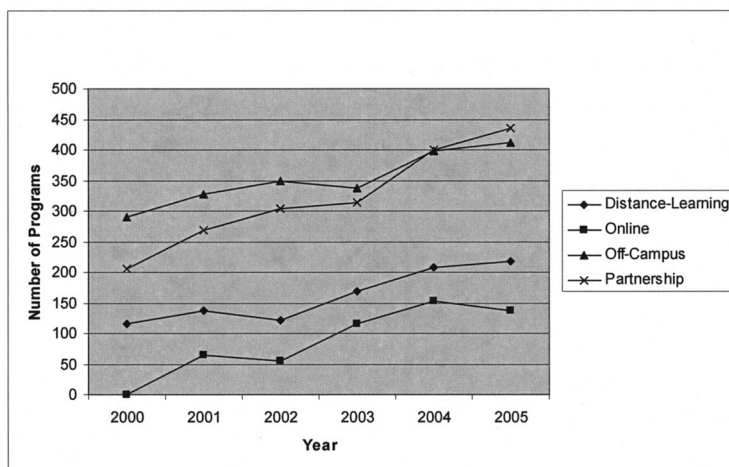


FIGURE 2
Program Growth, MBA

"in the practice of accreditation evaluation, Peer Review Teams must exercise flexibility. Deviations from standards may be encountered that represent innovation or cultural differences that the standards have not anticipated. Evaluations must be based on the quality of the learning experience, not rigid interpretations of standards" (AACSB, 2007: 2).

Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) suggest that accreditation acts as a disincentive for major programmatic changes. Evidence from the standards and innovative schools cited earlier indicates otherwise. The expectation that schools seek continuous improvement is similar to what is expected in industry, but it does not prevent major changes. The most competitive automobile firms (e.g., Honda) use quality approaches that rely on continuous improvement, yet they implement major changes (e.g., restructuring, acquisitions, and new models, etc.). While AACSB accreditation standards call for continuous improvement, it can be realized by either incremental or major improvements over time. Evidence from the 2004 AACSB Strategic Management Survey (unpublished report) supports this position. Deans reported the degree of strategic changes that they planned to make over the next 3 years as follows: many changes, mainly incremental (48%); few changes, but radical (26%); few changes, mainly incremental (15%); and many changes, mostly radical (11%).

The top five areas in which deans plan to make changes are overall prestige and reputation (3.58); financial resources (3.35); program offerings (3.22); quality of faculty (3.19); and quality of students (2.89).¹ Therefore, AACSB schools are not limited

in any way concerning the magnitude of their improvements as long as they are consistent with the school's mission. Additionally, AACSB does not prevent a school from changing its mission. The most important factor of continuous improvement is the quality of the resultant program changes. While AACSB accreditation standards impose some restrictions on what schools can do, they are functional and reasonable, and allow for significant variance in strategy so that schools can determine how to best meet the needs of their constituencies.

AACSB DOCUMENTATION PROVIDES VALUE TO BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) suggest that there is a trend toward "accreditocracy," which they describe as increased formalization, reliance on hard data, documentation, and continuous improvement. Their term "accreditocracy" is quite similar, as they apply it, to bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is commonly used to refer to useless paperwork, senseless layers of approval, long turnaround on decisions, and little flexibility.

Most business schools are part of large universities, however, which were bureaucratic long before business schools ever existed. The U.S. Department of Education Commission on the Future of Higher Education report indicates that "too many of our colleges and universities have not embraced opportunities to be entrepreneurial. . . . For their part, state and federal policymakers have also failed to make supporting innovation a priority" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006: 8). Therefore, it seems illogical to conclude that AACSB causes schools to be bureaucratic. While

¹ These scores are based on a 5-point scale (5 = many changes, 1 = few).

documentation is required, it provides value to schools.

Similar to the successful and creative firms mentioned earlier, accredited schools are required to provide documentation to AACSB. Evidence of performance is consistent with the strategy implementation process used in industry. It is hard to imagine any organization that would reward the accomplishment of major performance goals without verifiable evidence.

Similar to the successful and creative firms mentioned earlier, accredited schools are required to provide documentation to AACSB. Evidence of performance is consistent with the strategy implementation process used in industry. It is hard to imagine any organization that would reward the accomplishment of major performance goals without verifiable evidence. The reporting required for AACSB accreditation is conceptually analogous to corporate reporting to shareholders. However, AACSB reporting is far less burdensome than the reporting requirement of publicly traded firms and, contrary to claims made by Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006), it consists of both quantitative and qualitative data. Schools must demonstrate that learning has taken place: a core goal of business education. This is a goal that all business school stakeholders share, and for which stakeholders want evidence of achievement; therefore, the documentation provides a benefit by serving the independent assessment needs of stakeholders. In an environment of increased oversight and accountability, AACSB-accredited schools are well prepared to demonstrate stakeholder value.

AACSB accreditation is based on 21 concise standards, categorized into three broad areas (strategic management, participants, and assurance of learning), which I suggest contribute to AACSB documentation requirements being quite reasonable. For example, the time needed to maintain accreditation has been significantly reduced since changes introduced in 2002. Prior to these changes, maintenance reviews were very similar to initial accreditation reviews in which all standards are reviewed. The maintenance reports were typically 150–200 pages long, and visits took 2.5 days. Since 2002, the maintenance process has been streamlined to focus on strategy and continuous improvement as well as provide constructive

feedback to schools. Maintenance reports, required every 5 years, are now typically 40–50 pages long and visits take 1.5 days. Schools are required to complete annual reports, but these are kept by the school until maintenance reviews and are typically only 4–5 pages long.

Thus, and contrary to bureaucratic processes, accreditation may be seen to provide value to schools by helping them develop and improve. AACSB's 2005–2006 initial and maintenance accreditation review satisfaction surveys reveal that deans of schools being reviewed find value in the review process. All deans from schools that received an initial review reported that it added value to their school, while 92% of deans from schools receiving a maintenance review reported that they found value in the process. Overall satisfaction scores (on a 7-point scale) from deans receiving an initial and maintenance review were 6.34 (91%) and 6.22 (89%), respectively. Comments from Dean Randy Boxx and Dr. John Proe (coordinator of accreditation) from the Harry F. Byrd, Jr., School of Business at Shenandoah University are illustrative of the value derived from the initial accreditation process:

The accreditation process has had a major, positive impact not only [on] the Harry F. Byrd, Jr., School of Business but also on Shenandoah University as a whole. The entire culture of the Byrd School has changed. Our School today is clearly a mission-driven enterprise, is focused on achieving important strategic goals, and operates daily according to clearly spelled out processes, procedures, and policies. Students, faculty, the central administration, business leaders, and alumni are all standing taller and are very proud of what the entire stakeholder group has accomplished. United together, they supported the building of high quality business programs with continuous improvement throughout the operations and activities of the School. The impact on scholarly output, faculty development, curriculum enhancement, and assessment has changed the entire spirit of the faculty. In addition, the pursuit of accreditation has improved faculty and student recruitment and has given credibility to the School and the University. It has been a long and arduous journey, but it has been well worth it with changes that are almost immeasurable.

Accreditation maintenance reviews are conducted every 5 years and use some data that is already collected by schools for other purposes. In certain cases, AACSB accreditation can save schools time and effort when seeking other forms of accreditation. For example, NVAO, the accreditation organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (the Flemish region of Belgium), has recently recognized AACSB accreditation as equivalent to its own standards and accepts AACSB documentation for its accreditation process. AACSB accreditation may also save time when seeking other forms of accreditation (e.g., regional). The annual reports can also be used to document school activities for university level purposes. Data collected and analyzed for accreditation reporting is useful for the school's strategic planning and decision making.

Overall, therefore, it would follow that accreditation provides a framework for the effective management of business schools and encourages innovation in business education. While administrative effort is needed to secure and maintain accreditation, the increasing demand for AACSB accreditation (currently 106 schools are in preaccreditation and 52 are in initial accreditation) suggests that the benefits of accreditation far outweigh the costs.

OTHER TOPICS

There are several issues, although they have not been documented in published articles, merit discussion due to the negative effect they may have on management education. Based on years of questions directed to AACSB staff and comments in numerous venues, I believe discussing the following issues and providing accurate information is constructive.

GMAT for Graduate Programs

Given the frequent questions and comments that AACSB staff receive, there is a commonly held belief that the GMAT is required for all applicants to graduate programs. The GMAT as a tool for admission to graduate business programs has not been required by AACSB standards since changes to the standards were made in 1991. Standard 6 specifies that "the policies for admission to business degree programs offered are clear and consistent with the school's mission" (AACSB, 2007: 23). AACSB's current position is that recruiting quality students can be achieved in many ways

and that schools are best suited to choose their selection tools.

Faculty Qualifications

Over many years, AACSB staff have responded to questions about faculty qualifications that reflect uncertainty about what is expected from faculty in accredited schools. It is common for faculty and administrators to assume that all faculty must be academically qualified. *Academically qualified faculty* have significant academic preparation that is relevant to teach in a given area, while *professionally qualified faculty* have significant professional experience and preparation that is relevant to teach in a given area. Given their mission, schools have much latitude to demonstrate faculty qualifications in both categories. AACSB standards indicate that for undergraduate programs, at least 50% of faculty should be academically qualified and that in total, at least 90% should be academically and professionally qualified (AACSB, 2007: 43). This flexibility is reflected in 2005–2006 data from *DataDirect* (AACSB, 2007), which indicates that on average faculty at 507 accredited schools are composed of 63.7% academically qualified and 28.1% professionally qualified instructors.

A related perception is that peer-reviewed journal articles are the sole way to demonstrate maintenance of academic qualifications. However, AACSB does not dictate how faculty should maintain their qualifications. For example, the standards indicate that "There is no intent in these standards to describe a fixed pattern of activities faculty members must follow to maintain their qualifications. Expectations of the school, as well as individual characteristics and circumstances, will guide the choice of maintenance efforts" (AACSB, 2007: 48). However, "the portfolio of intellectual contributions should emanate from a substantial cross-section of the faculty in each discipline" (AACSB, 2007: 48). Table 2 provides further evidence that schools decide where to focus their scholarly activities.

Last, many faculty and administrators seem to believe that all faculty must be graduates from AACSB schools. For example, job listings in the Academy of Management Placement Service website regularly indicate that applicants must have a PhD from an AACSB-accredited school. However, there is no such requirement in the current standards. This is a matter of choice for each school. AACSB recognizes that many schools choose to

TABLE 2
Scholarly Emphasis

Discipline-based Scholarship, Contributions to Practice, Learning & Pedagogical Research	106 (23%)
Contributions to Practice, Learning & Pedagogical Research, Discipline-based Scholarship	85 (18%)
Learning & Pedagogical Research, Discipline-based Scholarship, Contributions to Practice	3 (1%)
Discipline-based Scholarship, Learning & Pedagogical Research, Contributions to Practice	22 (5%)
Learning & Pedagogical Research, Contributions to Practice, Discipline-based Scholarship	10 (2%)
Contributions to Practice, Discipline-based Scholarship, Learning & Pedagogical Research	32 (7%)
Equal Emphasis on Discipline-based Scholarship and Contributions to Practice and then Learning & Pedagogical Research	76 (16%)
Equal Emphasis on Contributions to Practice and Learning & Pedagogical Research, and then Discipline-based Scholarship	34 (7%)
Equal Emphasis on Discipline-based Scholarship and Learning & Pedagogical Research, and then Contributions to Practice	7 (1%)
Learning & Pedagogical Research, and then Equal Emphasis on Discipline-based Scholarship and Contributions to Practice	4 (1%)
Discipline-based Scholarship, and then Equal Emphasis on Contributions to Practice and Learning & Pedagogical Research	24 (5%)
Contributions to Practice, and then Equal Emphasis on Discipline-based Scholarship and Learning & Pedagogical Research	21 (5%)
Equal Emphasis on Discipline-based Scholarship, Contributions to Practice and Learning & Pedagogical Research	39 (8%)
Total	463

Note. This table is based on 2005–2006 data.

limit their faculty hiring to candidates who obtained their PhD from an AACSB-accredited institution, based on past evidence of success of such graduates. AACSB also recognizes that outside the United States, institutions that have not earned AACSB accreditation may be producing outstanding doctoral graduates. Furthermore, restricting faculty hiring to graduates from AACSB-accredited schools would eliminate scholars in related fields (e.g., psychology) from being hired. Therefore, AACSB encourages accredited schools to hire faculty based on quality, not whether the faculty member graduated from an AACSB-accredited school.

Curriculum Requirements

Years worth of questions and comments that AACSB staff has received lead me to conclude that curriculum requirements are the most common area of confusion. Faculty and administrators alike commonly believe that AACSB requires schools to offer courses in, for example, accounting, ethics, or international business. However, AACSB does not require schools to teach any particular courses, although there are curricula guidelines (e.g., ethics content). The standards permit schools to provide ethics and other required content in many forms including dedicated courses, cross-curricular integration, seminars, and so forth. For example, AACSB standards state that “schools should assume great flexibility in fashioning curricula to meet their missions and to fit with the specific circumstances of particular programs . . . accreditation does not mandate any particular set of courses, nor is a prescribed pattern or order intended” (AACSB, 2007: 70).

Schools are required to deliver, for example, accounting, ethics, or international business content, but *how* they deliver it is a school decision based on its mission.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that AACSB accreditation provides value to numerous stakeholders and promotes advancements in business education. It provides an incentive for strategic development and program improvement. Nonetheless, AACSB accreditation is obviously not the sole contributor to school success. Nor does accreditation guarantee that a school will innovate, achieve all the goals that it sets, or satisfy all stakeholders. AACSB accreditation is a framework and process that increases the likelihood of a school’s meeting its goals and meeting the needs of student, faculty, employers, and other constituents. It is a general baseline of quality that encourages innovation and continuous improvement in a global environment.

Moreover, I hope I have demonstrated that, contrary to Julian and Ofori-Dankwa’s (2006) claims, AACSB accreditation has a positive impact on business school strategy, encourages flexibility and creativity, and provides numerous value-added benefits through accreditation-related reporting. In addition, contrary to commonly held beliefs, I have pointed out that AACSB provides broad and flexible guidelines in the areas of graduate admissions, faculty qualifications, and curriculum requirements. Overall, therefore, I contend that AACSB provides significant value for business schools and their stakeholders.

APPENDIX

AACSB Standards for Business Accreditation

Strategic Management Standards

1. Mission Statement

The school publishes a mission statement or its equivalent that provides direction for making decisions. The mission statement derives from a process that includes the viewpoints of various stakeholders. The school periodically reviews and revises the mission statement as appropriate. The review process involves appropriate stakeholders.

2. Mission Appropriateness

The school's mission statement is appropriate to higher education for management and consonant with the mission of any institution of which the school is a part. The mission includes the production of intellectual contributions that advance the knowledge and practice of business and management.

3. Student Mission

The mission statement or supporting documents specify the student populations the school intends to serve.

4. Continuous Improvement Objectives

The school specifies action items that represent high priority continuous improvement efforts.

5. Financial Strategies

The school has financial strategies to provide resources appropriate to, and sufficient for, achieving its mission and action items.

Participants' Standards

6. Student Admission

The policies for admission to business degree programs offered by the school are clear and consistent with the school's mission.

7. Student Retention

The school has academic standards and retention practices that produce high quality graduates. The academic standards and retention practices are consistent with the school's mission.

8. Staff Sufficiency for Student Support

The school maintains a staff sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement for student support activities. Student support activities reflect the school's mission and programs and the students' characteristics.

9. Faculty Sufficiency

The school maintains a faculty sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement for the instructional programs offered. The deployment of faculty resources reflects the mission and programs. Students in all programs, majors, areas of emphasis, and locations have the opportunity to receive instruction from appropriately qualified faculty.

10. Faculty Qualifications

The faculty has, and maintains, intellectual qualifications and current expertise to accomplish the mission and to assure that this occurs; the school has a clearly defined process to evaluate individual faculty member's contributions to the school's mission.

11. Faculty Management and Support

The school has well-documented and communicated processes in place to manage and support faculty members over the progression of their careers consistent with the school's mission. These include:

- Determining appropriate teaching assignments, intellectual expectations, and service workloads.
- Providing staff and other mechanisms to support faculty in meeting the expectations the school holds for them on all mission-related activities.
- Providing orientation, guidance, and mentoring.
- Undertaking formal periodic review, promotion, and reward processes.
- Maintaining overall plans for faculty resources.

12. Aggregate Faculty and Staff Educational Responsibility

The business school's faculty in aggregate, its faculty subunits, and individual faculty, administrators, and staff share responsibility to:

- Ensure adequate time is devoted to learning activities for all faculty members and students.
- Ensure adequate student-faculty contact across the learning experiences.
- Set high expectations for academic achievement and provide leadership toward those expectations.
- Evaluate instructional effectiveness and overall student achievement.
- Continuously improve instructional programs.
- Innovate in instructional processes.

13. Individual Faculty Educational Responsibility

Individual teaching faculty members:

- Operate with integrity in their dealings with students and colleagues.
- Keep their own knowledge current with the continuing development of their teaching disciplines.
- Actively involve students in the learning process.
- Encourage collaboration and cooperation among participants.
- Ensure frequent, prompt feedback on student performance.

14. Student Educational Responsibility

Individual Students:

- Operate with integrity in their dealings with faculty and other students.
- Engage the learning materials with appropriate attention and dedication.
- Maintain their engagement when challenged by difficult learning activities.
- Contribute to the learning of others.
- Perform to standards set by the faculty.

Assurance of Learning Standards

15. Management of Curricula

Management of Curricula: The school uses well-documented, systematic processes to develop, monitor, evaluate, and revise the substance and delivery of the curricula of degree programs and to assess the impact of the curricula on learning. Curriculum management includes inputs from all appropriate constituencies which may include faculty, staff, administrators, students, faculty from nonbusiness disciplines, alumni, and the business community served by the school.

The standard requires use of a systematic process for curriculum management but does not require any specific courses in the curriculum. Normally, the curriculum management process will result in an undergraduate degree program that includes learning experiences in such general knowledge and skill areas as:

- Communication abilities.
- Ethical understanding and reasoning abilities.
- Analytic skills.
- Use of information technology.
- Multicultural and diversity understanding.
- Reflective thinking skills.

Normally, the curriculum management process will result in undergraduate and master's level general management degree programs that will include learning experiences in such management-specific knowledge and skills areas as:

- Ethical and legal responsibilities in organizations and society.
- Financial theories, analysis, reporting, and markets.
- Creation of value through the integrated production and distribution of goods, services, and information.
- Group and individual dynamics in organizations.
- Statistical data analysis and management science as they support decision-making processes throughout an organization.
- Information technologies as they influence the structure and processes of organizations and economies, and as they influence the roles and techniques of management.
- Domestic and global economic environments of organizations.
- Other management-specific knowledge and abilities as identified by the school.

16. Undergraduate Learning Goals

Bachelor's or undergraduate level degree: Knowledge and skills. Adapting expectations to the school's mission and cultural circumstances, the school specifies learning goals and demonstrates achievement of learning goals for key general, management-specific, or appropriate discipline-specific knowledge and skills that its students achieve in each undergraduate degree program.

17. Undergraduate Educational Level

The bachelor's or undergraduate level degree programs must provide sufficient time, content coverage, student effort, and student-faculty interaction to assure that the learning goals are accomplished.

18. Master's Level General Management Learning Goals

Master's level degree in general management (e.g., MBA) programs: Knowledge and skills. Participation in a master's level degree program presupposes the base of general knowledge and skills appropriate to an undergraduate degree. Learning at the master's level is developed in a more integrative, interdisciplinary fashion than undergraduate education. The capacities developed through the knowledge and skills of a general master's level program are:

- Capacity to lead in organizational situations.
- Capacity to apply knowledge in new and unfamiliar circumstances through a conceptual understanding of relevant disciplines.
- Capacity to adapt and innovate to solve problems, to cope with unforeseen events, and to manage in unpredictable environments.

Adapting expectations to the school's mission and cultural circumstances, the school specifies learning goals and demonstrates master's level achievement of learning goals for key management-specific knowledge and skills in each master's level general management program.

19. Specialized Master's Degree Learning Goals

Master's level degree in specialized programs: Knowledge and Skills. Participation in a master's level program presupposes the base of general knowledge and skills appropriate to an undergraduate degree and is at a more advanced level. The level of knowledge represented by the students of a specialized master's level program is the:

- Application of knowledge even in new and unfamiliar circumstances through a conceptual understanding of the specialization.
- Ability to adapt and innovate to solve problems.
- Capacity to critically analyze and question knowledge claims in the specialized discipline.

Master's level students in specialized degree programs demonstrate knowledge of theories, models, and tools relevant to their specialty field. They are able to apply appropriate specialized theories, models, and tools to solve concrete business and managerial problems. Adapting expectations to the school's mission and cultural circumstances, the school specifies learning goals and demonstrates achievement of learning goals in each specialized master's degree program.

20. Master's Educational Level

The master's level degree programs must provide sufficient time, content coverage, student effort, and student-faculty interaction to assure that the learning goals are accomplished.

21. Doctoral Learning Goals

Doctoral level degree: Knowledge and Skills: Doctoral programs educate students for highly specialized careers in academe or practice. Students of doctoral level programs demonstrate the ability to create knowledge through original research in their areas of specialization. Normally, doctoral programs will include:

- The acquisition of advanced knowledge in areas of specialization.
- The development of advanced theoretical or practical research skills for the areas of specialization.
- Explicit attention to the role of the specialization areas in managerial and organizational contexts.
- Preparation for teaching responsibilities in higher education (for those students who expect to enter teaching careers).
- Dissertation, or equivalent, demonstrating personal integration of, and original intellectual contribution to, a field of knowledge.
- Other areas as identified by the school.¹

¹ For guidelines to standards and other accreditation information, go to <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/>.

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