



Thoughtful **LEADERSHIP**

As tough challenges confront management educators, AACSB International takes up the responsibility of being a **thought leader** on critical issues.



by **Richard Sorensen**

It was fitting that the theme for AACSB International's 2005 International Conference and Annual Meeting was "the next horizon," since the organization is beginning an expansion into new territory. In the past five years, AACSB has undergone radical changes in its activities, its services to members, and its physical location. Although we remain focused on accreditation, we are now entering a new phase as we commit ourselves to thought leadership as well.

There has never been a more crucial time for organizations such as ours to step forward and propose strategies for improvement in our field. I believe that if AACSB takes a strong position on critical concerns, the association can help lead deans and school administrators through times of potential crisis and shape debate on key issues.

Top Concerns

We all know that management education is facing ongoing challenges posed by media rankings and the doctoral shortage. Additional topics that AACSB wants to

address are the value proposition of management education and the ways business schools can develop closer ties to the business community.

These areas of thought leadership were developed by the AACSB International board of directors during a comprehensive strategic planning process, drawing on extensive input from the membership. The board was building on the work of the Committee on Issues in Management Education, which I had the privilege of chairing during the past year.

We will provide thought leadership by conducting research on key management education issues and providing management educators with tools that will help them communicate with stakeholders. We've also created several new positions to help us build our thought leadership capabilities.

Neal Mero, our new Associate Vice President for Accreditation and Development, will support accreditation development and lead efforts to secure research funding. We're recruiting an Assistant Vice President for Knowledge Services to focus on research and mine the growing AACSB business school database. Stephen Watson, former principal of Henley Management College in the U.K., has become our first Scholar in Residence. He will complete projects related to thought leadership and also work with members around the world who are interested in seeking accreditation. In addition, the AACSB World Headquarters will host visiting faculty scholars beginning this fall.

The Core Competency

While thought leadership will be a major emphasis while I am board chair, we will not lose sight of our core competency, which is business school accreditation. Founded in 1916, AACSB International adopted its first accreditation standards in 1919, and it has been the world's leader in the accreditation of undergraduate and graduate business programs.

With a continuing commitment to business accreditation, AACSB can become even better. During my term, I expect that the association will strengthen its international membership, improve worldwide awareness of accreditation, and make AACSB a global advocate for management education.

Our peer review teams have the major responsibility in our accreditation review process. As we continue to adjust to the five-year review cycle and add to the number of accredited schools, expanding the number of trained reviewers will be an important priority. One of our goals for the upcoming

year is to expand the orientation and training we offer potential peer review team members, both through adding more peer review training opportunities at selected AACSB events and by implementing an online version of the training program this summer.

Expanding the Reach of Accreditation

While our members understand how important accreditation is, sometimes prospective students, parents, and other stakeholders do not. Therefore, one of our other goals for the coming year is to heavily promote the value of accreditation. Our approach will be multifaceted: We will publicize AACSB to the media, develop materials to explain its role to stakeholders, and clarify our advocacy role outside the U.S.

To achieve these objectives, we will seek national and international publicity. We're developing a PowerPoint resource packet about key management education issues that can be shown at advisory board meetings, community meetings, and other venues. We'll create talking points that deans can use

Meet Rich Sorensen

After someone has served more than 20 years as dean at the same institution, how does he keep himself committed and engaged? For Rich Sorensen, who became dean of the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in July 1982, one answer is to seek out new challenges—both within his home university and within organizations such as AACSB International. Another answer is to work tirelessly on continuing improvement.

"We are all faced with dynamically changing environments that require constantly changing answers," says Sorensen. "The Pamplin College's earlier focus was on helping students solve business problems by developing their technology skill sets. Now we have added a component that focuses on experiential leadership development in a global business environment."

During his time at Virginia Tech, Sorensen has directed a \$70 million fund-raising campaign and organized a comprehensive strategic planning initiative. He was no stranger to undertaking large and critical projects. Prior to joining Virginia Tech, he spent nine years as dean of the John A. Walker College of Business at Appalachian State University and helped the school achieve initial AACSB accreditation.

He has been deeply involved in organizations devoted to improving tourism in the state and the region, serving on the Commission on the Future of Southwest Virginia, the

Southwest Virginia Economic Development Commission, and Virginia's Southwest Blue Ridge Highlands. He also founded North Carolina High Country Hosts. Not surprisingly, he has worked with local and regional business associations, including the Small Business Advocacy Council and the North Carolina Region D Advisory Council on Government, Business, and Industry.

Sorensen has long been active in AACSB International, serving on the committees for Initial Accreditation, Business Accreditation, Continuing Accreditation, Governmental Relations, and Standards. He also has served as chair for the Accreditation Quality Committee and the Committee on Issues in Management Education. His one-year term as board chair began in July.

Sorensen holds a bachelor of science in electrical engineering from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute and MBA and Ph.D. degrees in management from New York University's Stern School of Business. In recognition of his many contributions to the region, he has received the Greater Blacksburg Chamber of Commerce Eugene Jones Memorial Service Award, the Boone Jaycees Distinguished Service Award, and the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Community Recognition award. He also received the Appalachian State University Trustee Award for Outstanding Teaching and holds membership in many honorary societies.

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The View from Virginia Tech

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University—known as Virginia Tech—was founded as a land-grant institution in 1872. Located in Blacksburg, Virginia, it is now the state's largest university, with 25,600 students enrolled in programs through colleges and the graduate school.

While the school offered its first BBA in 1925, the school of business was not officially established until 1961. At that time, it boasted 28 faculty members and 823 students. In 1986, the college was named the Pamplin College of Business in recognition of a \$20 million gift to the college. The money was given by Robert B. Pamplin, a 1933 graduate who became chairman and chief executive officer of Georgia-Pacific Corporation, and his son, Robert B. Pamplin Jr., who also attended Virginia Tech and is president of the R.B. Pamplin Corporation.

Today, the Pamplin College of Business offers majors in accounting and information systems, business information technology, economics, finance, hospitality and tourism management, management, and marketing. Its on-campus enrollment is about 3,600 undergraduates and nearly 270 full-time graduate students in master's and Ph.D. programs. Additionally, the school serves part-time graduate students in Blacksburg, at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Center in metropolitan Washington, D.C., and via five distance learning sites across the state.

The school offers students a chance to earn a dual degree—an MBA from Pamplin and a master's degree from one of its partner schools: Thunderbird University in Glendale, Arizona, and Institut National des Telecommunications in Evry, France. In addition, students have the chance to study global business during annual study abroad programs in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The college also offers a global business minor and a fall semester program at Virginia Tech's Center for European Studies and Architecture in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland.

The college is ranked in the nation's top 50 undergraduate business schools by *U.S. News & World Report* and among the top 100 MBA programs worldwide by *Financial Times*. The school is accredited by AACSB International.

when working with the media. We're releasing reports that outline AACSB's positions on media rankings and the value proposition of management education.

At the same time, we're putting more emphasis on our ongoing value of accreditation campaign. This includes the creation of a new visual identity symbolized by an updated accreditation seal that reinforces our long heritage and high standards. The seal features the new tagline: "Earned Excellence. The Best Business Schools in the World." Schools with accounting accreditation also can use the tagline "The Best Accounting Programs in the World."

The Value of Accreditation campaign is being supported with both print and electronic materials; accredited schools can download the new seal from www.aacsb.edu. As students, parents, and other stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of AACSB accreditation, we expect to reach more members and strengthen our own brand.

Improvements in Service

In addition to promoting accreditation initiatives and assuming more thought leadership, the board and I will be devoting attention to providing better services for member schools. For instance, we want to streamline the planning process for conferences and seminars, develop strategies for corporate relationships, enhance our affinity group activities, and conduct regular needs assessment for members.

In another important move, we plan to enhance the value of the data system maintained by Knowledge Services. In the next year, members will be able to get the data they want on demand, identify and manage comparison groups more effectively online, and manage a wide array of their own data in a secure online environment. We also plan improvements to our accreditation reports, and we are designing the first module devoted to accounting accreditation.

Looking Ahead

As the association prepares to celebrate its 90th anniversary in 2006, we need to assess what strengths brought us this far and what strengths will carry us into the next century. It seems obvious that we must focus on what could and should be done, rather than choosing priorities simply based on what resources we have available.

What AACSB *should* do and *can* do is become a thought leader for business education worldwide. What we *should* do and *can* do is improve our accreditation processes and promote the value of accreditation across the globe. Therefore, we will allocate resources accordingly as we focus on these critical tasks going into the next year. **Z**