

AACSB Accreditation and the Economy

How does AACSB plan to respond to the financial challenges facing business schools relative to its accreditation?

Here are some perspectives relative to the questions we have received.

Review Schedules

There have been a few requests from schools to postpone the maintenance of accreditation reviews. It is the strong consensus of both the Maintenance of Accreditation Committee and the Accounting Accreditation Committee that AACSB will proceed with all maintenance reviews as scheduled. Initial accreditation reviews will continue to be scheduled based on assessments of a school's readiness.

Application of Accreditation Standards

AACSB's accreditation philosophy must remain committed to "mission-based" accreditation with a focus on schools demonstrating "overall high quality" and "continuous improvement" in support of their academic degree programs in business and accounting. Alignment with AACSB standards should be expected. Where there are clear issues with alignments, teams should so state their concerns. If the financial challenges facing business schools and accounting programs raise concerns regarding "quality" and "continuous improvement," the peer review team should state such concerns and use the process to clearly communicate with the business school (and accounting program as appropriate) and the institution about these concerns and threats. The professional judgment of the team will determine if such concerns rise to a level that leads to "sixth-year reviews" for maintenance visits or "deferrals" for initial accreditation visits. Clear threats to a school's ability to align with AACSB standards, the possible impacts on quality, and the possible outcomes of sustained misalignment should be clearly articulated.

Schools' Response

Schools should demonstrate a clear understanding of the expectations represented in AACSB's standards. In light of the challenges that many business schools and accounting programs face, it will be important to demonstrate that rational, strategic responses are being developed and implemented. Schools should demonstrate that their strategic management plan is driving decisions or is being revised such that priorities are clear and deployment of resources support the most important priorities of the school.

The Peer Review Team's Perspective

It is entirely likely that every member of any AACSB peer review team faces similar challenges at his/her institution. The benefit of having a peer review team conduct the review as scheduled is the ability to share the collective and individual experiences of how different institutions are facing the financial crisis. Conducting all reviews with a strong focus on consultative feedback

will be critically important. Additionally, peer review teams must base their judgments of the existence of “overall high quality” and “continuous improvement” in the context of the school’s alignment with all applicable standards, not just a few.

There is no doubt many schools will be challenged to sustain deployment of academically and professionally qualified faculty. In the face of such challenges, compensating actions should be evident. The team’s assessment of such actions must be from the framework of quality and not just focus on a school’s failure to meet the objective expectations found in Standards 9 and 10. The numerical expectations of these two standards should be the start of discussions with a school or accounting program regarding the deployment of a qualified and sufficient faculty. Questions regarding student access to classes, student progress toward degree completion, instructional quality, faculty availability via office hours and extracurricular activities, etc. should be reviewed if there are serious concerns about faculty sufficiency and qualifications. The numbers alone are not sufficient without clear evidence of threats to quality and continuous improvement.

Consistency in Reviews

AACSB’s peer review process produces outstanding results and consistency due to the generous contributions of volunteers who support the process. However, consistency is always a challenge. To continue to support this effort, the AACSB constituency is strongly encouraged to use the on-line peer review training program which can be found at <http://aacsb.ekpondemand.com>. In addition, the program is also an excellent source of information for the leaders of business schools and accounting programs that will be experiencing a review in the future.

AACSB’s leadership, accreditation committees, peer review teams, and staff are committed to conducting accreditation reviews that are second to none in terms of quality and value to participating institutions. Continuous improvement must always be the cornerstone of the AACSB accreditation process. Feedback and counsel in support of this objective is always encouraged.