

Head Over Heart? AACSB's Mission Dilemma



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During the past three months, AACSB leadership unveiled a proposal to design and deliver a second quality-assurance product to supplement its 95-year-old accreditation. The proposed product, the Quality Business School Certification (QBSC), emerged from the AACSB Special Committee on Global Accreditation Strategy as a means of expanding the impact of AACSB's quality-assurance efforts. The goal was to construct a set of criteria more relevant to the quality improvement needs of schools that do not currently fit AACSB's accreditation model. The new certification would challenge a wide range of schools to achieve high quality in teaching and professional development, just as AACSB Accreditation has assisted institutions to excel in quality research and teaching. It seemed like a logical plan, but.....

Most business school deans who listened to the presentation were not convinced. Many believe that it would be difficult to differentiate the certification from the accreditation. They felt it might encourage schools to surrender AACSB Accreditation (or the pursuit of it) in favor of certification to avoid the high costs of quality research, and that business school stakeholders would be confused. Some deans simply felt AACSB should pay more attention to AACSB Accreditation and not be concerned with schools that cannot make it.

I think this feedback is well founded. The truth is, AACSB needs to be very careful not to dilute its brand and cause potential risk to its members and the association. AACSB is rightfully concerned that schools granting business degrees have increased to nearly 13,000 worldwide, yet only about 600 (less than 5%) hold the international symbol of quality management education—AACSB Accreditation. With more than 95% of schools offering degrees without AACSB Accreditation, and very few others having an international business accreditation at all, there is a real risk to management education stakeholders that the industry's quality and reputation will decline. Nearly all accredited schools are in high-income countries and relatively few business schools in the developing world have

the faculties required of AACSB Accreditation. Ratcheting up the risk is the belief of many that business schools did not do enough to prepare responsible graduates and thereby contributed to the Enron-like implosions and financial crisis.

Most of us in the management education industry do not believe that business schools were the problem, yet we are convinced that we will be an important part of the solution. Nearly every AACSB-accredited school is redesigning and revitalizing its graduate and undergraduate curricula. The emphasis is on better preparing socially responsible, global leaders with effective critical thinking and multi-cultural readiness. Business schools today are doing their best to give their graduates the “right stuff” to be successful in this challenging century. Effective quality assurance is needed now more than ever, and it should not be limited to the 5% with the resources and know how to gain AACSB Accreditation.

So where does AACSB go from here in its mission to advance quality management education worldwide? One thing is for sure—there are hundreds of able business school leaders thinking about and deliberating alternatives. Next month, the AACSB Board of Directors will conduct an in-depth planning meeting to examine alternatives in light of the concerns of AACSB-accredited schools over the proposed certification. Following the board’s recommendations, AACSB leadership will present the results of the board’s deliberations and revised plans to the participants at the **2011 Deans Conference** in Phoenix, Arizona, February 9–11, 2011. I invite all AACSB-accredited business school deans and deans of those schools seeking or considering the pursuit of AACSB Accreditation or the potential certification to join us.

Happy Holidays!