

Finding the Best of Both Worlds Isn't Easy



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As AACSB International—The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) nears 1,300 members in 81 countries/territories and now has accredited 633 schools in 40 countries; we can rightfully say we have the largest global membership of business schools. With more than 13,000 business programs in the world at last count, and likely many more that aren't counted, our membership makes up less than 10 percent of the world's business schools and those accredited by AACSB are just 4.8 percent.

Even with AACSB's significant growth since its globalization policy was adopted in September 2000, we still have lots of room to grow, especially in the developing world, before we can truly say we have achieved our mission. Nearly all AACSB-accredited schools are in high income countries and still 76 percent are in the United States. AACSB's mission to advance quality management education worldwide doesn't imply that there are boundaries between the developed and developing world; yet our numbers speak volumes about how much work needs to be done to be a truly global servant of management education.

One difficult challenge is the ineffectiveness of our primary product, business school accreditation, in meeting the developing world's needs. The fact is, AACSB's academically qualified faculty requirements make it next to impossible for most of these schools to attain AACSB Accreditation in the foreseeable future. We have known this constraint for several years; and last year, the AACSB Board attempted to launch a new quality assurance product geared toward schools that could not achieve AACSB Accreditation's academic faculty levels. But many, primarily U.S. members, felt that the new "certification" would place their schools at risk for one reason or another. These members asked that the new quality assurance product be deferred.

The AACSB Board is first and foremost responsive to its voting members and it decided to table the new quality assurance product for the time being. Market research tells us that there is a need for a good quality assurance product with less stringent academic faculty requirements to serve most of the developing world. While the proposed new product is deferred for now, the need remains. AACSB leaders are likely to bring a proposal for a new product up again once the work of the Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC) on Accreditation Quality is completed, should the BRC's product remain predominantly for developed country schools of business.

While AACSB Accreditation serves less than 5 percent of the world's business schools, giving the impression that it is truly for the elite, there are questions even now about the accreditation's appropriateness as a "one size fits all" brand. With 633 accredited schools and still growing, there is a risk that external stakeholders may perceive that all 633 schools are relatively the same since they hold the same accreditation. AACSB Accreditation is focused on the school's mission and the standards apply within the context of that mission. We have schools that focus extensively on research in addition to their teaching effectiveness. Others regard research as an important end but recognize broader categories of research as appropriate for their academic faculty development.

As AACSB continues to expand its accredited schools, it may become necessary to provide clearer guidance to stakeholders on the differences between school missions for a more transparent brand that meets today's public expectations. AACSB's leadership has a lot to think about. With a keen focus on its mission and clear thinking, AACSB will find the right recipe for sustaining its leadership in management education for the next century.