

# **Accreditation Success: One administrator's view**

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# Accreditation is ...

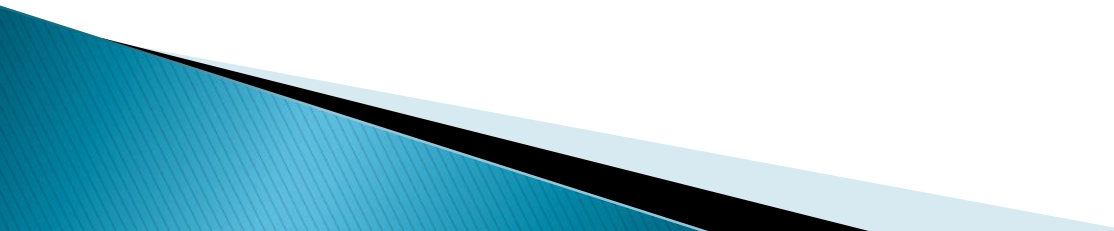
“The purpose of regional accreditation is to assure and improve the quality of higher education to support student success.”

Guide to Accreditation for Governing Boards by the ACCJC




# WHY ACCREDITATION?

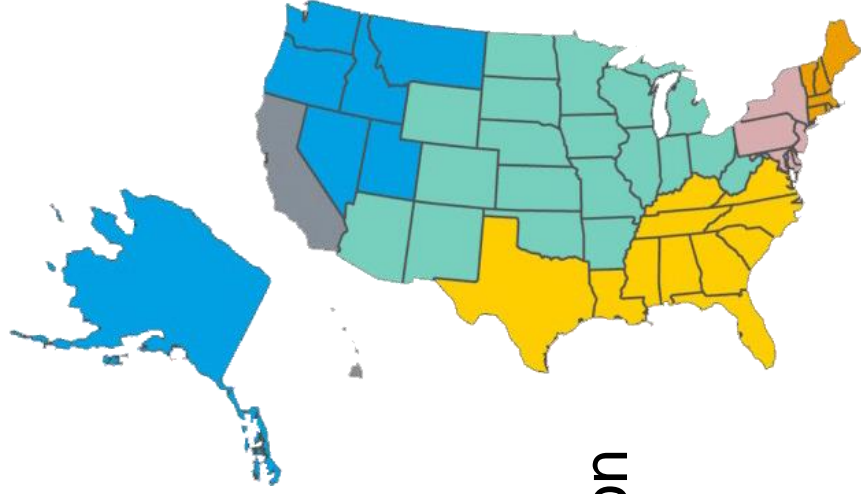
Achieving and maintaining accreditation assures the PUBLIC:

- the institution meets standards of quality
  - that the education earned there is of value to the student who earned it
  - that employers, trade or profession related licensing agencies and other colleges and universities can accept a student's credential as legitimate
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# Accreditation is ...

- A uniquely American system of quality assurance
  - A program by which education institutions provide public accountability
  - A peer-review process whereby institutions are evaluated against standards of best educational practice
  - Not a mechanism to enforce State or Federal Regulations but the guarantee of course transfer and eligibility for student financial aid both depend on an institution's accreditation
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## *Accreditation trends*



1788: Constitution

1887: NEASC

1926: WASC

1950s: Current methods adopted

1965: Financial aid linked

1980s: High loan default rate

1980s: Institutional effectiveness

1990:s CHEA, USDE recognition

2000s: Student learning outcomes

**None > Baseline > Aspirational > Accountable**

# 2012 Dissertation findings

## ▶ Hypothesis

Institutional cultural practices\* influence accreditation success.

## ▶ Research Methodology – studied 2 types of colleges:

- Five or more sanctions since 2003 (X colleges)
- Two contiguous reaffirmations since 2003 (Y colleges)

## ▶ Cultural\* Practice Themes

**Division of Labor** – How the work of a particular activity is divided up amongst a community; the establishment of roles and responsibilities.

**Motivation** – The reason for taking and action; willingness or desire to do something

**Integration** – Combining multiple parts into a whole; coming into participation in an a group or institution

\* organization, tools, norms, behaviors, relationships, etc.

## *Theme 1: Division of Labor*

|                       | X Colleges   | Y Colleges  |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Accreditation Work    | Participants reported few difficulties in dividing work up among existing structures.          |   |
| Institutional Roles   | Participants reported more often that roles were not universally agreed upon.                  | Participants reported more often that roles were agreed upon and abided by and used similar language in describing the roles. |
| Role-related Conflict | Participants frequently reported conflicts and described them as acrimonious and long lasting. | Participants rarely described conflicts, and when pressed, reported them as minor and short-term.                             |
| Conflict Resolution   | Participants reported more on progress in spite of ongoing conflicts.                          | Participants reported more on how conflicts were overcome (ad-hoc, repetitive reinforcement, mediation, co-leading).          |

## *Theme 2: Division of labor quotes*

**Role definition:** “The senate [is] on one side...saying faculty must do SLOs...you have the union, who on their website...says, ‘faculty do not Have to do SLOs.’”

**Role definition:** “[We’ve] had a board that has worked well for a long time...I bet it's been 40 years of strong involvement, but boards that knew their role. Haven't micromanaged.”

**Conflict:** “They said, ‘It doesn't matter if we lose accreditation. We'll be taken over by somebody else. That just means the administration will be gone, but we'll still be here.’”

**Conflict:** “there was a bit of a ‘none of the recommendations are related to instruction. The problems are with the administration of the institution.’”

**Conflict resolution:** “If we start to lean away from [a shared governance topic], we each have a yellow card, and we can hold the yellow card up and say, ‘Caution, this is veering away from a [shared governance] issue.’”



## *Theme 2: Motivation*

|                           | X Colleges  | Y Colleges  |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Perceptions of importance | Participants reported that accreditation was not universally interpreted as important.                          | Participants reported that accreditation was universally interpreted as important.                                      |
| Source of motivation      | Participants reported that motivation for accreditation was more externally driven.                             | Participants reported that motivation for accreditation was more internally driven.                                     |
| Enforcement               | Participants reported that enforcement of accreditation-related processes has not been historically consistent. | Participants reported that enforcement of accreditation processes were a permanent part of the institution's practices. |
| Critical Mass             | Participants reported on the concept of critical mass as being important to motivation.                         |   |

## *Theme 2: Motivation quotes*

**Importance:** “We saw ourselves more as kind of an exclusive, stand-alone institution...we don't have to abide by the regulations..”

**Importance:** “You live and die by staying accredited. [We] all know it's important.”

**Locus of motivation:** “[The ACCJC] representative said,] ‘I knew you needed a stick,’ because it was just how hard she had to push us.”

### **Locus of motivation:**

“I think people are really proud of what we have here. So they take personal ownership. If we were put on warning, we would fall back and get out of it. You learn from your mistakes.”

**Locus of motivation:** The college “[did] it for accreditation,” rather than “because it's the right thing to do.”

**Enforcement:** “If somebody wants to go and develop curriculum...and they go somewhere [other than curriculum committee]...we say, ‘No.’”

## *Theme 3: Integration*

|                            | X Colleges   | Y Colleges  |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Contact with accreditation | Participants reported that the level of contact with accreditation has varied.                             | Participants reported that contact with accreditation was constant.   |
| Integrity of processes     | Participants reported on the development of nascent accreditation processes.                               | Participants reported on the integrity of existing formal processes (transparency, faithfulness, simplicity, productivity).             |
| Interconnectedness         | Participants did not report on interconnectedness as often, and instead reported on procedures and heroes. | Participants reported more on informal and formal approaches that served to connect constituents and activities across the institution. |
| Resources available        | Participants reported more often on a lack of resources.   | Participants reported that resources were readily available.  |

## *Theme 2: Integration quotes*

**Contact:** “I walked in new...I took [being the accreditation chair] on. To be honest, I kind of stumbled through it.”

**Contact:** “The faculty senate...is sending in three names. The president will interview [them] and select one faculty as the co-chair. We are looking 2-3 years ahead.”

**Integrity:** “[It’ s] a one-and-a-half year long process...to get funding for an idea...you could submit a strategic proposal...but there was only \$100,000.”

**Integrity:** “Program review is the way to ensure money.”

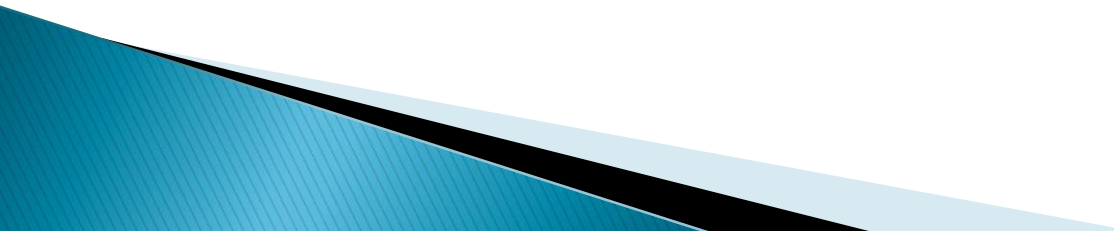
**Interconnectedness:** “[the college] would say, ‘oh yeah...transparency, production, dialogue’ but then not take action. “

**Interconnectedness:** [the campus community] accepted recent cuts because of “the culture of inclusiveness...they [were] at the table when all of these decisions are made.”’


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- ▶ Institutions whose practices align with accreditation standards are more successful in the accreditation process.
  - ▶ Accreditation standards are in fact “standards” of effective college practice.
  - ▶ So institutions that align practices with accreditation standards will not only be more successful in the accreditation process, they will be more effective institutions.
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Some thoughts for success





# Success

- ▶ Learn the language

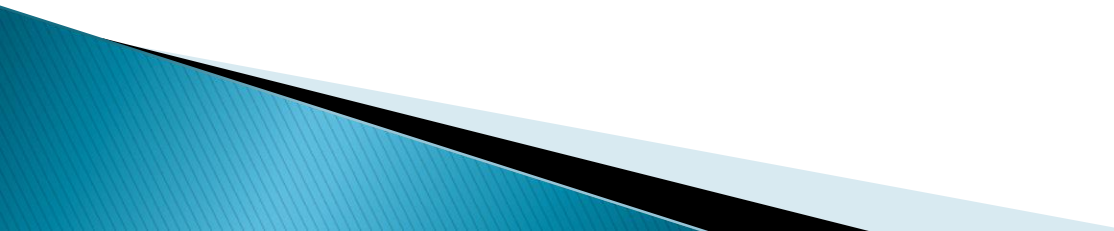
The accreditation process has its own vocabulary/grammar; learn it. The best way to do so is by serving on teams; but at a minimum take the Accreditation Basics online “course” and read/review ACCJC’s manuals

# Success

- ▶ Understand the Expectations

“Colleges are required to conduct program reviews that are data driven, and to use the results of such reviews to plan improvements to educational and institutional effectiveness.”

“Colleges are required to evaluate overall educational and institutional effectiveness and engage in continuous improvement.”



# Success

- ▶ Focus on the College Mission

The self evaluation should ensure that the institution examines the effectiveness of the educational learning programs and services the mission statement promises to provide, and **wisely use, its resources in achieving that mission**

# Success

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- ▶ Don't play "Hide and Seek"

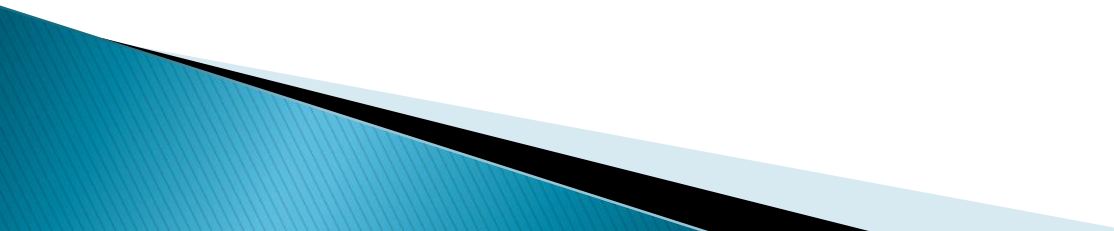
Use the process for improvement; this requires far too much energy and engagement and there is too much at stake to treat this as a regulatory exercise.

# Success

- ▶ Be organized

Start early, assign and resource the process (leadership, writing teams, oversight, data, communicate) set and adhere to timelines; engage in pervasive, productive dialog about what you find

# Success

- ▶ Be reflective (quality improvement oriented)  
No institution is perfect; no one is perfect. We expect of each other that we are committed to excellence; committed to improving.
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# Success

- ▶ Be supportive and constructive

Accreditation is no place to “air dirty laundry” or fight; “we” (the commission member institutions) expect that institutions are authentic in their self evaluation and have identified areas and strategies to improve.



# Success

- ▶ Be thorough and rigorous

Be empirical; collect relative data, evaluate the data against the standards, render a reasonable (peer-tested reasonable) judgment as to whether you meet/exceed the standards or need to improve.

# Success

- ▶ Align practices to the standards

Accreditation standards are fairly consistent across the country. The regional accreditors coordinate and various national organizations ensure that they adhere to federal policies.

The standards focus on "what" effective institutions do, not "how."

# Success

- ▶ Make the process easy for the visiting team  
The visiting team is comprised of peers who have volunteered their time and talent for the cause of academic quality. They will spend about 100 hours total in the evaluation about half of which will be during the site visit. It is difficult, rewarding and productive work when an institution is well prepared.

Moreover you will have made the evaluation and the planned improvements transparent for your institution and the students and communities you serve.

# Success

- ▶ Use the process as intended

For the past several decades, the purpose of accreditation has shifted to quality improvement. So accept that fact and use it for that purpose.

**QUESTIONS?**

