Chapter Eight:
Overview of Accreditation

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the major regional accrediting bodies and the common requirements that impact administration and finance at higher education institutions.

Academic and administrative unit assessment are closely scrutinized as these areas receive heightened attention from stakeholders, and many institutions struggle to obtain full compliance on assessment.
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Kristina ‘KP’ Powers is President of the Institute for Effectiveness in Higher Education. KP has served in leadership roles in colleges and universities for over 20 years, primarily in the areas of institution accreditation, institutional effectiveness, institutional research, financial planning, and strategy. Her research and practice focus on effective and efficient use of resources to advance higher education organizations.

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KP earned her doctorate from Florida State University in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a concentration in Higher Education Policy, a Master’s in Higher Education Administration from Florida State University, and a Bachelor of Science from the State University of New York, College at Brockport. Her books, Organization and Administration in Higher Education (third edition – 2022), Data Strategy in Colleges and Universities (2019), and Cultivating a Data Culture in Higher Education (2018) are published by Routledge. She has served as issue co-editor and author for New Directions of Institutional Research.
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Chapter Outline

1. Introduction
2. Understanding Accreditation
3. Types of Accreditation
4. Institutional Accrediting Agencies
5. Overview of the Institutional Accreditation Process
6. Roles and Responsibilities of the Accreditation Process
7. Administering and Funding a Successful Reaffirmation
8. Financial Implications
9. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
10. Conclusion
Accreditation is much like the process of moving, requiring a highly organized effort and a review of all items in-house. The process resembles unpacking in that one needs to review existing information in the context of a changing environment to determine not only how items at hand fit into the new place but also what new items are needed to create the conditions possible given the available means.
Seven Institutional Accrediting Organizations

- **Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (1962)**
  - Institutions: 134
  - Students: 2,300,000

- **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (1895)**
  - Institutions: 791
  - Students: 7,126,852

- **Middle States Commission on Higher Education (1919)**
  - Institutions: 524
  - Students: 4,160,962

- **New England Commission of Higher Education (1885)**
  - Institutions: 224
  - Students: 879,195

- **Higher Learning Commission (1895)**
  - Institutions: 984
  - Students: 5,247,706

- **Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (1917)**
  - Institutions: 163
  - Students: 1,339,941

- **WASC Senior College and University Commission (1924)**
  - Institutions: 204
  - Students: 1,351,693

Source: Data from CHEA, 2021 and graphic design by Institute for Effectiveness in Higher Education, 2021.
Despite variation in criteria across institutional accrediting agencies, all require institutions seeking accreditation to follow a similar five-step process.

- Eaton, 2015
Typical responsibilities of accreditation liaisons are as follows:

- Assisting with reaffirmation and site visits
- Ensuring integration of accreditation requirements
- Ensuring institutional understanding
- Ensuring accurate and timely submission of data
- Familiarizing campus constituents
- Informing accreditor of institutional changes
- Maintaining Institutional archive
- Remaining informed on accreditation
- Serving as a key resource person
- Serving as an institutional source of information
- Serving as the primary contact
Discussion Prompts
Discussion Prompts

1. What is the purpose of accreditation? What does an institution gain from being accredited? Are there benefits specific to faculty, staff, students, and administrators?

2. Select a specific administrator role. What role does this position play in the accreditation process? What challenges would you anticipate this role to face, and how would you mitigate them?

3. In what ways are the processes of the institutional accreditors similar and different? Which process is most attractive to you as an administrator and why?

4. Given the roles and responsibilities of an accreditation liaison, what are three primary skillsets that you would look for in selecting an accreditation liaison?
Discussion Prompts

5. Identify and describe three financial considerations and implications involved in obtaining reaffirmation of accreditation.

6. Building relationships within and outside of the institution is critical for a successful reaffirmation. Name two institution positions that were not identified which you feel could or should play a critical part in the accreditation process. Why?

7. How do you think the role of accreditors will change in the next five years? What impact will that have on higher education administrators?

8. Which bodies have accredited your institution? Where would students find this information on the institution’s website?
Discussion Prompts

7. In what ways can you creatively engage faculty, staff, students, and community members in the accreditation process?

9. Obtain the standards document for your institution’s institutional accrediting body (see websites in Table 8.1). After reviewing it, discuss how you would begin organizing institutional resources in your division to prepare for the written report and the on-site visit.

10. Upon reviewing the standards document for your institution, which areas do you think would be most challenging to demonstrate compliance with? Which would be easiest? Why?
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