

# Accreditation Farce

A comment worth reading in [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) is:

## ‘It’s Time for a New Definition of Accreditation

By Milton Greenberg



Mark Shaver for The Chronicle

The impending review and renewal of the Higher Education Act will be a defining moment in the tumultuous relationship between higher-education accreditation and the political forces of government. Many people in the academic world resist the inevitable and continuing political demands for greater openness, clinging to an almost romantic view of the academy, rooted in self governance, independence, and collegiality.

Many academics believe that public funds should have no strings attached, and that the most mundane rules of business or finance have no place in the academy. Critics of academic institutions are usually met with assertions that colleges are unique entities, operating under practices that are generally misunderstood and in need of autonomy irrespective of sources of support.

It is time for the academic community to face reality and negotiate, not on the basis of long-held myths, but on terms that reflect today’s variety of educational offerings and the role colleges are expected to play in improving the social mobility of both groups and individuals. Lurking now as perhaps the greatest challenge facing accreditation is a reduction in traditional higher-education institutions serving as the primary authority for education offerings, credits, and degrees. President Obama in August 2013 proposed that colleges be rated based on metrics measuring such things as affordability and student outcomes, which could be tied to alternative

accreditation requirements.

Ideally, accreditation is believed to be a voluntary, nongovernmental, peer-review process to monitor colleges and educational programs for quality assurance. The underlying purpose is to maintain colleges' independence through self-regulation rather than through rules and regulations set by a governmental ministry of education.

This dreamlike picture, suitable perhaps for a pre-World War II collection of New England colleges, has been out of vogue for half a century. Academe, however, still holds on to notions, for example, that accreditation is voluntary. Using its power of the purse, Congress has enacted laws and regulations of progressively greater detail and intensity that set conditions on access to federal money for students and research. Congressional committee hearings are held to monitor accountability. Professional self-regulation and accountability are barely visible. No college or university may be forced to be accredited, but no option exists for survival other than submission. Why do we cling to this myth?

The overriding purpose of accreditation is "quality assurance," a term commonly and widely used in speeches and writing about accreditation. It is a classic shibboleth—a term of art used by adherents of an idea but regarded by many people as meaningless.

Quality assurance suggests a goal that can be evaluated and distinguished from comparable applications. What accreditors realistically look for but are reluctant to admit is not quality but whether an institution meets minimal professional and financial standards. Do not assume that all who get the seal of approval are comparable.

Those in the academic world know full well that agreement on what constitutes quality in almost any discipline is virtually impossible. Most faculty members have resisted rigorous outcomes assessments of purported quality. The concept of accountability for performance is often viewed as a threat to academic freedom. Agreements among institutions and accreditors as to even a single course that should be required of a college-educated person have virtually disappeared. Why do we cling to this quality myth that is neither definable, useful, nor even true?

We are academics. Words are the coin of our enterprise. Does voluntary mean involuntary? Does quality mean, oh ... er ... uh ... well ... whatever? And just what does higher education mean? Do we have any idea left of what to expect of a person who holds an undergraduate degree? Consider, too, the state of the faculty, now composed largely of part-time instructors, many of whom teach at several institutions. Is that a personnel policy that suggests quality? Indeed, many challenges to both inputs and outputs of colleges and universities call into question the level of "quality" to which we aspire.

Much will be revealed by the results of the forthcoming renewal of the Higher Education Act, which is the main law governing how federal dollars are distributed to colleges and students. Caution: History teaches that government regulatory programs grow and rarely decline.

To meet the inevitable political challenges, an honest appraisal of the current situation must be confronted by academe. Specifically: Accreditation is not voluntary. It is not nongovernmental.

It does not demonstrably provide definable quality assurance. It is overly keyed to an institution's mission, making impossible some generic meaning of what a college or graduate is. And the underlying purpose—to maintain college independence through self-regulation and accountability—is seriously undermined, if not already at an end.

The debate over renewal of the act will reflect multiple competing concepts of the purposes of accreditation as a major player in the world of partisan politics, with emphasis on political beliefs, power, money, and procedural controls. Questions related to the core of campus life—educational process, the faculty, curricula, student services, and academic freedom—will receive short shrift by all sides. Lacking, above all, will be any consensus on what to do.

A first run at a new definition might contain these elements: Accreditation is a process by which recognized authorities validate that an institution meets minimal professional standards and accountability based on its mission. Standards established by professional groups and accrediting bodies are validated by governmental officials who also establish rules and regulations for the conduct of the accreditation process.

The essence of a renewed definition of accreditation repudiates the academic myth of the separation of politics and education and openly acknowledges a constant tension between the political processes of government and the traditional academic belief in a (nonexistent) self-regulating academy. Change must come mainly from accreditation, finding ways to clarify its operations and heighten colleges' accountability. The bottom line of defense remains concentrating on institutional autonomy, curriculum control, and academic freedom.

Milton Greenberg is an emeritus professor of government and a former provost and interim president at American University."

#### My Comment:

Mr. Greenberg offers, for the most part, an accurate view of accreditation. Accreditation is not just fraud upon the public, it works to punish critics to secure its deceptive practices under the guise of "quality assurance." Quality assurance can, however, be objectively tested."

See, for example, "University and AACSB Diversity." It provides a blueprint anyone can apply to test the quality of the accreditation.

This critical case study structures University's and AACSB's diversity standards in the following hypotheses: If the University puts into practice its diversity standard, then its administrators and faculty "cherish the free exchange of ideas, diversity of thought, joint decision making, and individuals' assumption of responsibility." If the AACSB puts into practice its diversity standard, then its accredited members "must show that within this (education) context its business programs include diverse viewpoints among participants [and]...[a]ccredited programs must demonstrate commitment and actions in support of diversity in the educational experience."

The antecedents of both hypotheses are demonstrated to be false.

<http://commons.aaahq.org/posts...>

Also, see, "Ethics, Power, and Academic Corruption."

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