

Accreditation and Research: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

One piece of information that should be taken from the College of Business faculty meeting held on August 25th (2006) is that the CoB admittedly only takes accreditation issues seriously sometimes, not all the time. Harold Doty's statements to the point that CoB assessment is incomplete were supported by David Duhon's statements that the SACS WEAVE database would be the source for much of the assessment data needed for the AACSB report. Here we are, merely six months from the AACSB visit, and the CoB doesn't really know what assessment data is available, much less is any of that assessment data documented. Vague references to alumni surveys, donor surveys, and so-called stakeholder surveys discuss items that most CoB faculty know are false – simply because they haven't been discussed since the last time AACSB came calling. In short, it is not unimaginable that Doty and crew may spend a good deal of the fall semester cooking the books, so to speak – falsifying assessment and other accreditation data in an effort to save accreditation. Of course, the ultra-secretive nature of the AACSB process created by the Doty administration doesn't help that image.

Doty and Company make AACSB seem very difficult, as if accreditation is akin to moving a mountain. What any logical person can figure out is that, to steal a worn-out expression, proper planning prevents poor performance. Accreditation does not have to be difficult. It may be tedious, but it surely doesn't have to be hard. Successful, low stress accreditation starts with a continuously implemented plan, not a plan that is dusted off every five or ten years and is accompanied by the scurrying of administrators and sycophants. Successful accreditation means that assessment of learning takes place every semester and in many forms, conducted by faculty who understand the importance of accreditation maintenance and whose labor is appreciated and rewarded appropriately. Graduate exit surveys are administered every semester and tabulated accordingly. Formal stakeholder surveys are administered regularly. The final year of the accreditation cycle consists of synthesizing these data into the accreditation report. When structured as a continuous process, the AACSB cycle is much less onerous than the current cycle faced by Doty and Company.

What else should we expect from the current crop of CoB administrators and Doty in particular? Doty has, since his arrival at USM, worked harder at getting another dean job than at any other endeavor. Doty's interview at the University of South Florida is well known, but his other campus visits have not been forgotten. Doty started well, making the short list at Texas Christian University, a school that would mark the high water (apologies to Doty's tailor) point in his quest for advancement. Since then, Doty's prospects have fallen to more lateral moves, including the University of North Texas and the University of Texas at El Paso. All of his searches have failed. Let's not forget about Doty's "entrepreneurial" work with respect to the Mississippi Council for Economic Education, an endeavor that certainly took some time to set up. Associate Dean Farhang Niroomand has also been distracted by his well documented travel and grant work, both of which are quite unusual for academic affairs deans at quality business schools. Barry Babin, chair of marketing and management, reportedly lives in airports, according to his wife. George Carter, chair of economics and finance, sees more courtroom time in his

role as expert witness than F. Lee Bailey ever did. Former accounting chair Rod Posey has two part time jobs that take up his time: lay preacher and Lion's Club poohbah. These are the individuals who are leading the CoB's accreditation charge, and they don't even seem to view USM as their primary professional residence.

For an indication of how the CoB leadership approaches the AACSB process, one has only to look at the way the CoB leadership approaches its individual research agendas. Like AACSB, research is a continuous process that becomes easy when made a part of a routine but is extremely difficult when placed on hiatus for long stretches of time. Documented on usmpride.com are relatively long stretches of inactivity in Doty's research program and the fact that he now apparently relies on former graduate students to carry him along. Both Niroomand and Carter have been shown to rely heavily on Edward Nissan to keep them research active; Nissan's rewards are also well documented at usmpride.com, and we still haven't found Posey's 99 missing articles. Finally to Barry Babin, the great scholar in the CoB. Babin's research productivity has fallen off tremendously, even before taking the chair's job. The dropoff was so significant that some faculty predicted his move to administration before it happened as a way to mask (or excuse) his inability to produce research. Babin never got a \$25,000 raise for research, but he found his home when he took the CoB and USM to the cleaners last year. CoB administrators are not consistent researchers. They do not place consistent value on continuous work in the research direction. If they can't focus on one of the three basic tenets of academia with consistency, then why should anyone believe they would or could place consistent effort on AACSB?

When pressed by Tom Lindley for a list of AACSB reaffirmation participant leaders, Doty stammered his way through a laundry list of usual suspects, most of whom are CoB administrators. These are the same CoB administrators who spend a substantial portion of their time on outside employment and who approach everything in life the way they approach research – haphazardly and in an ad hoc manner. The process is closed to faculty, and suggestions and comments are highly valued, especially from the time they are received until the time they hit the wastebasket. Doty and Company may be able to salvage AACSB, but they will have to put down their outside employment and job searches to do so, because they won't be getting much help from a faculty that is disconnected from the CoB administration's malfeasance.