A Comparative Analysis of Regional Accreditors: Role of Shared Governance in Accreditation

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A road map for the presentation

• How shared or faculty governance is incorporated into regional accreditation standards
  – Variability of criteria
  – Backtracking on shared governance
• Selected case studies examining how shared governance impacted accreditation reviews
Governance in Accreditation

- Primary focus on student learning
- Institution must have established governance oversight, procedures
- Expectations for faculty governance, role, or oversight used in evaluating accreditation vary among the regional accreditors
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

- Standards (2014)
  - Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience
    - Criterion 2: student learning experiences that are designed, delivered, and assessed by faculty (full-time or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals
  - Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration
    - Criterion 1: a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for decision making by each constituency, including governing body, administration, faculty, staff and students
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

• Language from 2009.
  – Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance)
    • A climate of shared collegial governance in which all constituents...participate in the governance function...
  – Standard 10 (Faculty)
    • The institution’s instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals
    • The faculty and other qualified professionals are responsible for devising and developing an institution’s academic, professional, research, and service programs within the framework of its educational mission and goals.
    • Faculty participation in institutional planning, curriculum review, and other governance roles can be an appropriate recognition of their professional competence and commitment, where consistent with institutional governance structures.
Standards (2016); 9 standards, formerly 11

– Standard 3: Organization and Governance

3.1: The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff...are clearly described in the institution’s by-laws... The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles.
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

– Also from Standard 3
  • 3.15: The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise.

– Previous language equivalent to section 3.15: “Faculty exercise an important role in the academic integrity of the institution’s educational programs.”
The Higher Learning Commission
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

• Guiding Values

  – 8. Governance for the Well-Being of the Institution

  • Governance of a quality institution of higher education will include a significant role for faculty, in particular with regard to currency and sufficiency of the curriculum, expectations for student performance, qualifications of the instructional staff, and adequacy of resources for instructional support.
The Higher Learning Commission
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

• Criteria for Accreditation (2013); currently under review
  – Criterion 5. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness
    • Core Component 5.B. The institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.
      – 2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution’s governance.
      – 3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.
The Higher Learning Commission
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

• Assumed Practices
  – B. Teaching and Learning Quality, Resources, and Support
    • 2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications
      – d. Faculty participate substantially in:
        » oversight of the curriculum—its development and implementation, academic substance, currency, and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
        » assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
        » establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel;
        » analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.
The Higher Learning Commission
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

• Previous (2003) Handbook of Accreditation
  – Criteria for Accreditation 1: Mission and Integrity
• Core Component 1d: The organization’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
  – Explanation included:
    • “...the organization must have structures through which decisions are made, responsibilities assigned, and accountability for end results established. Shared governance has been a long-standing attribute of most colleges and universities in the United States.”
  – Examples included:
    • “Faculty and other academic leaders share responsibility for the coherence of the curriculum and the integrity of academic processes.”
    • “Effective communication facilitates governance processes and activities.”
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

• Standard 2: Resources and Capacity
  – 2A. Governance
    • 2.A.1 The institution demonstrates an effective and widely understood system of governance with clearly defined authority, roles, and responsibilities. Its decision-making structures and processes make provision for the consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which they have a direct and reasonable interest.
  – 2C. Education Resources
    • 2.C.5 Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum, and have an active role in the selection of new faculty.
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

• From 2003 Handbook:
  – Standard 2: Educational Program and its Effectiveness
    • 2.A.7 Responsibility for design, approval, and implementation of the curriculum is vested in designated institutional bodies with clearly established channels of communication and control. The faculty has a major role and responsibility in the design, integrity, and implementation of the curriculum.
  – Standard 4: Faculty
    • 4.A.2 Faculty participate in academic planning, curriculum development and review, academic advising, and institutional governance.
  – Standard 6.D - Faculty Role in Governance: The role of faculty in institutional governance, planning, budgeting and policy development is made clear and public; faculty are supported in that role.
Principles of Accreditation, 2018 edition

Section 6. Faculty

Qualified, effective faculty members are essential to carry out the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic program. The tradition of shared governance within American higher education recognizes the importance of both faculty and administrative involvement in the approval of educational programs. Because student learning is central to the institution’s mission and educational degrees, the faculty has responsibility for directing the learning enterprise including overseeing and coordinating educational programs to ensure that each contains essential curricular components, has appropriate content and pedagogy, and maintains discipline currency.
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

• From 1998 Criteria for Accreditation:
  – Standard 4.8.8 The Role of the Faculty and Its Committees
    • Primary responsibility for the quality of the educational program must reside with the faculty... Much of their business will normally be conducted through such structures as committees, councils, and senates...

• But subsequent to 2007:
  – Standard 3.7 Faculty
    • 3.7.5 The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters. (Faculty role in governance)
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Senior College and University Commission

• Handbook of Accreditation 2013
  – Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

• 2.4 The institution’s student learning outcomes and standards of performance are developed by faculty... The institution’s faculty take collective responsibility for establishing appropriate standards of performance and demonstrating through assessment the achievement of these standards.
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Senior College and University Commission

— Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability

• 3.1 ...The faculty and staff are sufficient in number, professional qualification, and diversity to achieve the institution’s educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic and co-curricular programs wherever and however delivered.

• 3.10 The institution’s faculty exercises effective academic leadership and acts consistently to ensure that both academic quality and the institution’s educational purposes and character are sustained.
Standard 4. Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement

- 4.4 The institution, with significant faculty involvement, engages in ongoing inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning, and the conditions and practices that ensure that the standards of performance established by the institution are being achieved. The faculty and other educators take responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes and uses the results for improvement of student learning and success. The findings from such inquiries are applied to the design and improvement of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment methodology.

- 4.6 The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies, including the governing board, faculty, staff, and others, in institutional reflection and planning processes that are based on the examination of data and evidence.
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

• Accreditation Standards 2014
  – Standard II. Student Learning Programs and Support Services
    • A2. Faculty, including full time, part time, and adjunct faculty, ensure that the content and methods of instruction meet generally accepted academic and professional standards and expectations. Faculty and others responsible act to continuously improve instructional courses, programs and directly related services through systematic evaluation to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and promote student success.
    – Changes to second sentence, effective 2019: In exercising collective ownership over the design and improvement of the learning experience, faculty conduct systematic and inclusive program review, using student achievement data, in order to continuously improve instructional courses and programs, thereby ensuring program currency, improving teaching and learning strategies, and promoting student success.
    • A12 ...The institution, relying on faculty expertise, determines the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education curriculum, based upon student learning outcomes and competencies appropriate to the degree level.
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

– Standard IV. Leadership and Governance
  • Through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students work together for the good of the institution. In multi-college districts or systems, the roles within the district/system are clearly delineated.
  • A2. The institution establishes and implements policy and procedures authorizing administrator, faculty, and staff participation in decision-making processes.
  • A3. Administrators and faculty, through policy and procedures, have a substantive and clearly defined role in institutional governance and exercise a substantial voice in institutional policies, planning, and budget that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise.
  • A4. Faculty and academic administrators, through policy and procedures, and through well-defined structures, have responsibility for recommendations about curriculum and student learning programs and services.
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

  – Standard II
    • A2a ...The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for establishing quality and improving instructional courses and programs.
    • A2b. The institution relies on faculty expertise and the assistance of advisory committees when appropriate...
  – Standard IV, Leadership and Governance
    • A2a. Faculty and administrators have a substantive and clearly defined role in institutional governance and exercise a substantial voice in institutional policies, planning, and budget...
    • A2b. The institution relies on faculty, its academic senate or other appropriate faculty structures, the curriculum committee, and academic administrators for recommendations about student learning programs and services.
Conclusions

• Regional accrediting agencies generally assign a substantial role to faculty in
  – development of curriculum
  – criteria for evaluating/assessing student success

• Some variability in language, particularly in emphasis

• Importance placed on recognition of respective roles of governing boards, administrative leadership, faculty, staff, students
More Conclusions

• Recognition of the role of “shared governance” has disappeared from criteria for accreditation

• Most accrediting bodies have moved away from prescriptive language about faculty or shared authority, whether over the curriculum or other academic matters
Does Shared Governance Play a Role in Accreditation Problems?

- Most issues with renewal of accreditation center around institutional finances, assessment, planning, learning objectives
- Some cases include (or are even focused on) the roles of institutional governance groups, including shared governance
Case 1: University of Virginia
The Leadership Controversy at UVa

• June 10, 2012: President Sullivan resigns under pressure from members of Board of Visitors, largely over disagreements about role of UVa in online education
• After much drama, media reports, appeals from faculty and students, no confidence votes, Board reverses course June 26
• SACS Commission on Colleges Board of Trustees issues formal warning to Virginia in Dec. 2012 that the institution had failed to demonstrate compliance with Core Requirement 2.2 (Governing board) and Comprehensive Standard 3.7.5 (Faculty role in governance), with a required review by December 2013.
• SACS COC removes warning in December 2013
Lessons from Virginia

- Governing Board needs to follow proper governance procedures when making decisions
- Faculty governance responsibilities must be clearly defined—and followed
- Even the most prominent of institutions is not immune from threats to accreditation over governance problems
Case 2: Missouri Southern State University
MSSU, Accreditation, and Shared Governance

• Accreditation report by HLC visitation team in 2008 identified problems with governance and strategic planning:
  – Under long-time MSSU president, institution did not have a culture of shared governance
  – Faculty had not helped determine the priorities for the institution
• Although accreditation was renewed, HLC required a focused visit in 2011 to review status of shared governance
MSSU Response and Results

• Shared governance task force established by President but not activated until 2010
  – No confidence vote in the interim
• Task force presented suite of recommendations to President and local Board of Governors in 2011
  – Joint faculty-administration committees, especially for budgeting and strategic planning
• 2011 HLC review passed MSSU on its improvements in shared governance, but recommended continued improvement in formalizing processes
Lessons from MSSU

- Culture of shared governance important to retaining accreditation
  - Not by itself a reason to be placed on probation
- HLC retained concerns about effectiveness of shared governance
Case 3: City College of San Francisco

- On July 2, 2012, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges issued a show cause order to City College of San Francisco
  - Basis: tangled governance structures, poor fiscal controls and insufficient self-evaluation and reporting
  - Follow-up to a 2006 report citing failures across wide range of ACCJS criteria
  - 8 months to respond and to prepare closure plan
CCSF Show Cause: Governance Issues

• ACCJC evaluation report concludes that, although adequate structures exist for shared governance, “the effectiveness of these structures could not be verified and is questionable”

• Key issues included lack of trust, indirect resistance by the faculty to administrative initiatives, and lack of clear delineation of roles and authority
Resolving the CCSF Crisis

• The short version:
  – ACCJC came under intense pressure, as did CCSF
    • New leadership for both institutions
  – Evaluations in 2014 and 2016
  – Initial restoration status in 2014
  – Re-affirmation of accreditation in January 2017
Lessons from CCSF

- Clear demarcation of governance responsibilities important
- Lack of governance transparency can be one reason for potential loss of accreditation
Final Conclusions

• Accreditation agencies moving away from explicit recognition of shared governance
• BUT, clear governance processes and allocation of expectations remain important
• In rare cases, issues around faculty governance processes and responsibilities play important role in re-accreditation