The Accredited European University of Tomorrow: Accreditation, Creativity, International Recognition

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Abstract

The "severe economic slump" in Europe focuses attention on the need for the European universities to adjust academic programs to global business needs for creative and entrepreneurial skills for the jobs of tomorrow. Information and communications technology (ICT) and massive open online educational resources (MOOCs) and to "allow for an increase in the effectiveness of education," and yet appropriate standards of accreditation for European institutions of higher education have been avoided by policy-makers. The opportunity to raise European higher education standards to global standards is being ignored. Five years ago EU Regulation (765/2008) provided for standards for accreditation to be set. Yet little progress has been made across Europe. The gap between standards promoting equity "by increasing the availability of knowledge" is nowhere greater than between the best Western universities and their counterparts in Eastern Europe. The European Citizens Initiative (EUCIS-LLL), recognizes sad inequities in European higher education. They do not provide "equal access" for all European undergraduate citizens to best practices. This recognizes the failure of European Commission policy makers to set appropriate standards of accreditation for universities in Europe. Progress towards a European Union Higher Education Accreditation Council similar to the US Council for Higher Education (CHEA) needs to be put in place. The Bologna process and the Lisbon process are seen to be making little progress towards such European Union accreditation standards. This chapter proposes five European-wide accreditation standards. The need is comparability "with the standards and quality of higher education qualifications," so that the value of university education can be evaluated. This review is important. There is an urgent need for unified European accreditation standards to provide a foundation for the future employment prospects of young Europeans in the global economy.

Keywords: University accreditation, higher education, EU Commission on Education and Culture, EU Commission on Employment and Social Affairs.

*"In the EC we accord more importance
to a cow than to a hundred students…."*
Agence Europe 1-2 Dec 1986

Introduction

Higher education in the European Union, a Europe of Knowledge (2014) has, ever since the 1987 Erasmus Decision proved to be a "continuous challenge" (Jansen 1998). Progress in the arena of European wide university accreditation has yet to prove the inevitability of gradualness (Webb, 1923). The early frustration as expressed by Commissioner Marin and reported in Agence Europe three decades ago remains. The European Union still accords more importance to Agriculture than to Education (EU Budget, 2010). The European Union carefully regulates agricultural production, even to the extent of protecting the geographical origin of a product. Yet the European Union has yet to come up with a set of agreed standards for the accreditation of European Universities.

There is wide recognition of the link between educational attainment and prosperity. Evidence from the 2010 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) confirms "The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: the long-run economic impact of improving PISA outcomes" (2010). Nevertheless we know that "cash-strapped" governments even in the OECD have been "scrutinizing the nearly 5% of GDP they devote to education" (*The Economist*, 2010) and in many cases making cuts. Such is "the extent of austerity levied on the educational sector" that failure to achieve the EU 2020 goals of 40% enrollment in tertiary education is now assured (EU Policy Brief, 2012).

But not in the United States where, in the competitive world of international higher education, investment continues and the "USA is still No.1" (Washington, 2012). Indeed The Housing and Economic Recovery Act 2008 (42 USV 4501) actually provided $100 billion for education as a necessary investment in the success of recovery from the financial crisis. Increasing private philanthropy is traditionally the funding model for private education in United States universities, but is now being seen to become a major part of the funding model for public universities (Applegate, 2012). David Blinder, Vice-Chancellor of the University of California noted that with State funding having

dropped "we need to learn from the privates." This is in contrast to the funding model of higher education in Europe where philanthropy has had a history of limited involvement and where the European Union has largely seen institutional resources merely provided with "the right to seek Community funding" (Corbett, 2005).

The Importance of Appropriate "Accreditation"

Philanthropy and private funding are linked to a natural strategy. From the outset goals are defined and the donors "expect measurable results from investments" (Gose, 2013). The strategic goals of philanthropy in higher education, the deliverables, are expected to be aligned with the liberal arts and the outcome of providing real marketable skills to the next generation. This is in contrast to the views of the educational establishment in Europe which believes that curricula should be left to academics, business amateurs, rather than business professionals.

This philanthropy brings consideration of the role being played by the external independent accreditation of schools and programs in the United States. Typically philanthropic funds will be tied to gaining and maintaining appropriate institutional and program accreditation. Wide acceptance that colleges and universities are failing to keep pace with commercial development in the global workplace has generated United States-wide audits of programs to ensure continuing improvement in the quality of curricula and appropriate practical and not just theoretical instruction. Acknowledgement of "the Great Stagnation of American Education," (Gordon, 2013) underlines acceptance of the fact that 21st century American undergraduates may not be getting sufficient preparation and may not "perform competently in analyzing complex non-technical problems" (Bok, 2008, p. 8).

Graduation from an accredited program impacts on jobs and licensure employers. Therefore, quite rightly, there is an increasing partnering between universities and future employers. This is then noted and independently verified as "(accreditation) speaks to a sense of public trust, as well as to professional quality" (APA, 2012). Thus "one of the first steps any prospective student should take before enrolling in a college or university" (ACICS, 2013) in the 21st century must be to make sure that the school is accredited by the accrediting agency appropriate to the student's prospective career, and that the university employs faculty with real-world experience gained from employment in such a career.

It may well be that in Europe "higher education continues to be acknowledged as one of the primary policy issues" (Keeling, 2006). Yet we know that the Bologna Declaration and its process has stalled after its pompous initiation in 1990s. Uniform performance measures, comparisons of quality, and the essential concept of accreditation, of setting European standards, remain "fields of debate" (Keeling, op cit). From the perspective of students, the future generators of Europe's wealth, there should be cohesive accreditation standards to make the quality of higher education transparent and the people employed in education accountable so as to provide an appropriate prospectus for those undertaking tertiary education and therefore for the future prospects of the European Union.

The Value of Accreditation

The accreditation of higher education in the United States was developed "to protect public health and safety and to serve the public interest" (ACICS, 2014) and was initiated in the 1880s to focus on educational and admission standards. The early focus was on building credentialing capacity and facilitating the transfer of credits earned at one university so that they might be recognized by other universities. The early focus was regional, but by 1918 this had grown to a national focus and a federal effort to establish best practices for higher education. After World War II the GI Bill (1944) led to an increase in professional and specialized accreditation and in 1952 the US Congress recognized that non-governmental accreditation was the most reliable source for determining the quality of higher education and training and continues to do so. The setting of accreditation standards reflects three core values of higher education, all essential to academic quality:

- Institutional autonomy,
- Academic freedom,
- Peer and professional review (Eaton, 2014).

The real value of accreditation and the associated certification is the fact that the certification process "added value" to the institution (IAF, 2014). The value of a program is added by an accrediting agency in much the same way as the process of meeting ISO (International Standards Organization) and other international standards. Certification of accreditation assures stakeholders in an institution that the minimum standards of quality education, curriculum, faculty, facilities, and process are met. There is assurance that the institution has set up performance measures which ensure

continuous improvement. The findings of the IAF (International Accreditation Forum) survey "confirm that accreditation procedures are generating significant benefits and added value" and this is a key reason why hundreds of thousands of international students "see American higher education as the gold standard in the world" (Stanek, 2001). This is why "more than 820,000 international students came to US colleges in 2012/2013" (Chapell, 2013). In spite of the cost, this is why nearly 20% of all international students make the United States their education destination of choice (UNESCO, 2013).

The Purpose of This Paper

This paper is written to draw attention to the numerous challenges that impede the Bologna process to provide guidelines including a set of standards for the creation of independent accrediting bodies to accredit universities and higher education colleges in the European Union. First, it provides a reflection on the nature of accreditation standards. Then, followed by notes on the demand for transparency and accountability and a consideration of the problems faced by higher educational institutions. Consideration is made of the benefits which derive from institutional accreditation, to be followed by a description of five standards which might move the accreditation introverts in Europe to the more extravert approach being taken by universities in the United States and the rest of the world.

The Nature of Accreditation

University Accreditation of any Post-secondary school or University is generally considered to provide a formal published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a program following a cyclical evaluation. Such engagement occurs after conferral meetings and/or the exceeding of an agreed set of standards. Attention to the process is focused on the quality of management (Orsingher, 2006) and the primary nature of the institutional Mission and Strategic plan. Failure to do so will result in Mismanagement Styles and the ultimate demise of the institution (Adizes, 2004).

The responsibility for accreditation procedures, in the European Union, rests with "national agencies, voluntary associations, rector's conferences, inter-institutional networks, and professional organizations" (CRE Project, 2001). The reliance is an introverted self-assessment with outcomes confirming funding in a manner which fails the needs of students and closes

the academic administrative mind (Bloom, 1987). The emphasis is on facilities and bureaucratic statistics which do not include such outcome measures as the successful employment of student alumni and the level of salary a graduate may expect to earn from their tertiary education experience. In many cases stakeholders (students' families, future employers, local community participants) in the university are simply not considered.

Generally Higher Education Accreditation is seen to require:

- Standards set to determine fitness for purpose,
- Self-study by the institution under review,
- Financial viability and long term sustainability,
- External review by independent peers,
- External evaluation by independent testing services.

The accreditation process in Europe, as already noted, is generally delegated to or by the nation's ministries of Education. Research at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences at the University of the Czech Republic is underway to survey, analyze, and make transparent the information processes which are related to "collecting, use, analyzing and disclosure" (Haskova et al., 2013). However there continue to be "barriers to the effective utilization of information" in the 28 institutions which were open to the 2013 survey. Barriers exist on both the institutional and a national level. One is reminded that transparency refers "to the principle of creating an environment where information on existing conditions, decisions, and actions is made accessible, visible, and understandable to all market participants" (Greuning and Koen, 1999). As Greuning also noted policymakers "become accustomed to secrecy" and are comfortable as it provides "the benefit of hiding their incompetence."

That is where the US accreditation system has overtaken Europe's individual accreditation process. Accreditation in the US is warranted by numerous agencies such as: the US Department of Education, the Council for Independent Education, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the 6 regional accrediting bodies. Their function is regulated by the Higher Learning Councils, build capacity, which provide transparency and accountability to potential customers for higher education in the United States.

Demand for Transparency and Accountability

The demand for transparency and accountability in higher education begins with the call from taxpayers to call government to account "for the productivity of knowledge workers" (Miller, 1996). The price of higher education is rising (Trombley, 1993) and it is clear that higher education will need to evolve to keep the cost of higher education affordable (Sreenivasan, 2013). In the absence of proper accounting for this intangible value, governments simply cannot track productivity and growth, and as a result European students are not provided with even a reasonable knowledge of the value of the higher education they choose to pursue.

The demand for accountability arises because the established "rules of the game" by which economic value has been determined "are being rendered obsolete by technological and social developments, to say nothing of business reality" (OECD, 1992). Furthermore, the value of an undergraduate degree is coming into question (*The Economist*, 2012). So the demands for transparency and accountability need to be seen in Europe in the context of:

- Falling levels of quality. "Since the Second World War, Europe has progressively surrendered its lead in higher education to the United States" (*The Economist*, 2005) The United States boasts 17 of the world's 20 top universities (*Shanghai ranking*, 2013), England 2 and Switzerland 1. This is a sad reflection on the quality of European universities and confirms that the European Union is failing its young,
- Rising levels of access to the Internet, university rankings, and the growing impact of the social media assessing university education,
- Competition from the private sector in higher education even in the face of national government reluctance to embrace the private sector,
- Increased acceptance of the need for accreditation by the most highly rated European higher education institutions.

Problems seen in the United States are equally evident in many regions of Europe, but while the response in the United States is open and stems from a pro-active approach, the response by European higher education institutions seem by some estimates to be closed and at best reactive (Gjorgov, 2006).

These problems include:

- Responding to the growing demand for transparency and accountability as the availability of critical analysis grows and is heard on the social media,

- The pace of change in the business world. The traditional humanities have not related to the revolution in business and "the most devastating criticism is that they are useless" (Swaim, 2013). In much the same way professional application programs are slow to adjust and this can be most easily seen in accounting where the top three accounting research journals have no practical application whatsoever,

- The funding of higher education. The defunding of higher education, particularly in the United States, is focusing attention on weakness in the university education model. The provision of free education at the tertiary level and the maintenance of education standards are not sustainable. Government plans to extend university education (as with the EU 2020 goals) without an appropriate level of funding guarantee a further reduction in the quality of the education available. This can be seen particularly in Eastern Europe,

- New university models. The success of 'for profit' tertiary institutions such as the University of Phoenix taken together with the expansion of online courses being made available by the majority of higher education institutions questions the traditional university model. Regardless of the apathy of European universities to online degrees "the number of job candidates with online bachelor's degrees has rapidly increased in recent years ….and acceptance of the degrees by employers is becoming more common" (Haynie, 2013),

- The expansion of "distance learning" indicates a return in many business areas to a Master Intern relationship to enable students to achieve the necessary mastery of subject areas and a return to professional "on the job" training combined with online courses to acquire appropriate credentials,

- Competency based instruction where the academically trained faculty begin to be replaced by a professionally trained faculty who can provide and share with students relevant real world knowledge and experience.

Accreditation provides an opportunity for higher education institutions to discuss these matters and to share in coming up with solutions to the problems, to take a pro-active approach to them and thereby underwrite the

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future for jobs and growth in Europe. Educational systems in most EU countries are centrally regulated through governmental education standards, quality control and development standards and other restrictive regulation. By its very nature, decentralization leads to greater diversity among providers and hence greater school choice but also differences in standards among schools (European Commission, 2000). Therefore the importance of setting national standards and quality controls which although respecting those differences would ensure parents and students may acquire a minimum educational quality that is socially acceptable. Such 'protection' of customers is particularly important in the EU where transition and decentralization opened up the possibilities for diversity among local public schools as well as the establishment of private schools offering different programs and curriculum of study (Mojsoska, 2006).

Benefits from Accreditation

The overarching goal of program and/or institutional accreditation "is to ensure that the education provided by higher education institutions meets acceptable levels of quality" (USDE Overview, 2012). This benefit must be fully transparent and seen in the context of the diversity of degrees and institutions. Public knowledge, and particularly the knowledge available to prospective students, is certainly opaque across national borders and even within countries.

There are three other associated goals (Eaton, 2012):
1. Engendering private sector confidence,
2. Facilitating the transfer of academic credentials,
3. Providing access to government and private funds.

As already noted private sector confidence can lead to philanthropic contribution and the establishment of funding for appropriate first-class facilities. The transferability of academic credentials provides for student mobility and reliable credit transfers. This would lead to the same ease of credential transfer in Europe as is available in the United States. Access to additional government and private funds provides the opportunity for higher education to grow and contribute to the growth of jobs and industry in their respective geographical areas.

Five Suggested Key Performance Standards

1. Social Responsibility Standards

The need for European Quality Assurance and Accreditation standards to open up their institutional evaluation is already established. A Social Responsibility Standard recognizes the need to share the mission and strategic plans of the institution with stakeholders. Such a standard will disclose:

- The major accomplishments made in line with the institutional mission
- A list of high quality intellectual contributions to local and national communities
- Partnerships with industry
- Internships and other professional opportunities for students and the local community
- Social responsibility projects initiated and completed by the University.

Equivalent accreditations standards may be found published on the following websites:

ACBSP – Standard 1 ACICS – Criteria 2013, Title III Chapter 1
AACSB - Standard 1&2   HLC – Criteria 1&2

2. The Strategic Planning Process

Between 1993 and 2007, The Goldwater Institute (2010) tells us: "the number of full-time administrators per 100 students at America's leading universities grew 39%" while at the same time the number of employees engaged in teaching "only grew by 18%." The nature of this information is increasingly in demand on university campuses.

A strategic planning process standard would disclose:

- The current institution's strategic plan, not just the narrative but appropriate financial statements and non-financial goals,
- The procedures leading to the final strategic plan, with inputs from: Faculty, students, and administrative staff and their involvement in the planning process,
- Performance measures showing progress made on previously approved plans and their final outcomes,
- Details of pending plans and planned outcomes and deliverables.

But in the Europe Union the strategic plans of universities, when they exist, have yet to be widely shared with students, faculty and stakeholders.

Equivalent accreditation standards may be found published on the following websites:

ACBSP – Standard 2	ACICS – Criteria 2013, Title III
AACSB - Standard 3	HLC – Criteria 5

3. Student and Stakeholder Focus

This standard will be of particular interest to potential students and their parents. Concern inevitably focuses on whether present curricular adhere to the liberal arts concept, the classical concept of "liberales artes" that is "the provision of useful skills for free people" (Cicero, 55 BC). Education, arming young people "with useful arts that are indispensably necessary," was set down long ago by Aristotle (50 BC). Concern today is focused on provision in the curriculum of those "useful" arts that are indispensable necessary (Small, 2014). "Acquiring an excellent education is the best way not to be left behind as technology races ahead" (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014, p. 197).

A student and stakeholder standard would disclose:

- The measurement of knowledge transfer preferably by third party organizations such as the Educational Testing Service and Peregrine Academic Services,
- The formal process of course learning objective review and the resulting changes made,
- The analysis of Comprehensive Learning Outcomes with multiple-year trend analysis,
- Curriculum links with business and the professions and the use of real world business techniques,
- Assessment and evaluation of non-curricular activities.

Increasingly, accredited colleges in the United States have turned to independent evaluation of knowledge transfer based on rigorous research by agencies such as the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2014). More focused global educational support is available from Peregrine Academic Services and these independent assessments of business programs are designed to provide comparative data on which to base continuous improvement in college curricula.

Equivalent accreditation standards may be found published on the following websites:

ACBSP – Standards 5   HLC Criteria 3
AACSB – Standards 12, 13, 15   ACICS – Criteria 2013

4.Faculty and Staff Focus
A Faculty and staff focus standard would disclose:

- An analysis of contact /class hours and the overall faculty load,
- The deployment of faculty and staff with appropriate qualifications,
- Credentials appropriate to the subjects being taught, including real-world experience,
- An analysis of full-time and part-time employment,
- A comprehensive analysis of community and scholarly contributions,
- Details of Faculty and Administrative staff evaluation processes,
- Details of online and hybrid courses and trends in online coursework.

Faculty teaching business at the university level used to require academic qualifications. Professional qualifications were not considered appropriate. The trend particularly for business disciplines is to require relevant real world experience. So professional qualifications are now widely accepted for accreditation purposes and increasingly requested in advertisements by colleges that wish potential students to know that they will learn from "professors with real-world experience in your chosen field" (Colorado Tech, 2014). This trend has yet to be accepted by universities in Europe.

Equivalent accreditations standards may be found published on the following websites:

ACBSP – Standards 5   HLC Criteria 3, 4
AACSB – Standards 5, 6, 12, 13, 15   ACICS – Criteria 2013

5. Global Workplace Standard
A Global workplace standard would disclose:

- The methods of program delivery for graduate and undergraduate programs,
- The Common Professional Components of each course,
- Details of facilities and equipment including technical details of the availability of software made available to students and faculty,

- Details of Library and other research resources available to students and faculty,
- Enrollment procedures and other administrative features of the university,
- Details of special opportunities such as a Junior year abroad or other International experience.

Equivalent accreditations standards may be found published on the following websites:

ACBSP – Standards 6   HLC Criteria 3, 4
AACSB – Standards 4 ACICS – Criteria 2013, Title III Chapter 1-7

Conclusion

Allan Bloom (1987) first identified a separation of the disciplines across the curriculum and the impact that the lack of integration might have on students and faculty in an article "Our listless universities." Indeed he was prescient in identifying the disintegration of the business curriculum in particular so that subjects have been increasingly studied using theory in isolation and, perhaps ironically, he noted how "the heads of the young are stuffed with a jargon derived from the despair of European thinkers."

Businesses that collaborate with industry find the need to provide integration to promote student understanding. They are also noting how the business curricula, as with other curricula, have got lost, and are out of touch with relevant real world activity. Drucker noted carefully that "Management is thus what tradition used to call a liberal art" (Drucker, 2001). Real world managers draw on a knowledge resource that integrates: "all the knowledge and insights of the humanities and the social sciences" and of course the physical sciences. Therefore, in order to survive, university curricula need to integrate with business and provide students with knowledge relevant to the real world, the "soft skills," networking and so make management and other disciplines true examples of the liberal arts. European universities need to regain the lead providing young Europeans with the skills they need to prosper in the global world wherein they will make their careers and generate the prosperity of the European Union.

The trend in America's best universities is to become more transparent. University administrators had become accustomed to budget and strategic plan secrecy. Secrecy was attractive. Secrecy hid their incompetence,

but secrecy also provided a barrier to policy success and as The Goldwater Institute discovered "Administrative Bloat" was "the real reason for High Costs in Higher Education." This is also likely to be the case in the European Union. Accreditation brings transparency and accountability to the universities. Transparency and accountability are the buzzwords in education and they are needed; nowhere are they needed more at present than in the European Union.

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