



ITAA Special Topic Session

Benefits of Program Accreditation—An Administrative Perspective

Presenters:

Dr. Lise Youngblade, Professor & Dean, College of Health & Human Sciences, Colorado State University

Dr. Jana Hawley, Professor & Dean, College of Merchandising, Hospitality & Tourism, University of North Texas

Dr. Sherry Haar, Professor, Department of Apparel, Textiles & Interior Design, College of Health & Human Sciences, Kansas State University

Dr. Kathleen Rees, Regents Professor & Chair, Department of Management, Marketing & Information Systems, College of Business Administration, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

Dr. Carol Warfield, Panel Moderator, TAPAC Executive Director, Professor & Department Head Emerita, Department of Consumer & Design Sciences, Auburn University

Keywords: accreditation, advocacy, recruitment, evaluation & planning, assessment

“**Benefits of Program Accreditation—An Administrative Perspective**” featured a panel with experience in both institutional and programmatic accreditation. The panel members shared their experiences and insights regarding benefits of program accreditation.

The panelists have experience with various accrediting agencies, e.g., Southern Association of Colleges & Schools (SACS), Higher Education Learning Commission (HLC), National Association of Schools of Art & Design (NASAD), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Council of Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC), Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition & Dietetics (ACEND), American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy (COAMFTE), Textile and Apparel Programs Accreditation Commission (TAPAC), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA), Occupational Therapy (ACOTE), Education (CACREP) & (AEQEP), and Construction Management (ACCE).

Panelists discussed (a) their experience with programmatic and/or institutional accreditation and program reviews, (b) their current administrative and leadership responsibilities re: program accreditation, i.e., programs that are accredited and/or are in the process of applying for accreditation (c) pros and cons of program accreditation from their experience and insight—both

with respect to the process of application and the results of the accreditation decision, (4) observations of and experience with University level response re: accreditation, (5) stakeholders in program accreditation, and (6) recommendations for programs considering accreditation.

The following main themes emerged from the panelist's presentations:

Accreditation Benefits:

- Brings cache; it's a "bragging point" for marketing and recruiting faculty, students & collaboration
- Helpful in recruiting resources (e.g., grants, faculty, equipment, space)
- Encourages ongoing evaluation, planning & goal setting for improvement
- Provides a group of peers agreeing on similar standards (accredited vs. unaccredited programs)
- "Forces" a program to engage in self-reflection & self-study every X number of years
- Guide to curricular decisions, including adding, retaining or dropping courses and class size guidelines
- Can unite a department/program toward common goals
- Self-study forces everyone involved to evaluate what we do, why we do it, and where we can improve, recognizing the benefits to both the program and the students within the program
- Understanding the importance of tying department strategic goals to the university's
- Getting ready for the site visit encourages freshening up spaces in the college, even on limited funds—administration is often supportive
- Valued by university administration for its outside review
- Can give universities incentives to provide program support to maintain or enhance faculty development, facilities and learning resources
- Provides a "seat at the table" for advocating and negotiating for the program
- Provides an important opportunity to advocate for a program in showcasing the value and successes of both the program and faculty and staff who have created and continue to maintain a strong program
- Development and continuous monitoring via assessment of student engagement opportunities and mastery of learning outcomes
- Recognition of program quality by university administration and other stakeholders, including industry and funding agencies
- Provides incentives for innovative, quality enhancements and stretch goals for programs and facilities
- May enable program to use TAPAC accreditation to meet periodic university-required program reviews
- Peer group of accredited/endorsed programs is source for benchmarking

Accreditation Challenges:

- Significant time spent on accreditation activities
- Changing accreditation requirements; sometimes lack of clear communication why
- Accreditation requirements ensure quality & consistency, but sometimes limit flexibility & innovation
- Maintaining practices over time, especially with changes in faculty
- Gathering and archiving examples of student learning outcomes

Recommendations to Programs & Faculty:

- Start early & make sure there is time & support allotted
- Form faculty teams to take ownership of various sections; get as many involved as possible
- Embrace the exercise as an opportunity to come together collectively to set your vision
- Appoint a lead and establish a system to archive evidence of each assessment criteria
- Use the opportunity to advocate for your program
- Be strategic in thinking about the intersection of requirements with the ability to be innovative in your program
- Attend TAPAC workshops to learn what is expected, how to strategize, & how to conduct the self-study
- Expect everyone to clean their spaces before the site visit
- Be willing to take criticism—there will be some; see it as opportunity for growth
- Recognize and value the amount of time to manage, gather and maintain archives, write the report, and present evidence by adjusting faculty appointment load
- Important to build industry support and buy-in for TAPAC accredited programs

Relevant Quote: (Jana Hawley)

“Initially, when TAPAC was first being uttered at ITAA, I was not sold on launching an accrediting body for our field. I believed that the cost did not outweigh the benefits. But as I have sat through workshops, watched faculty prepare their self-study, and experienced the value of having an accredited program—I’m SOLD!”