The Triad of Actors: Quality Assurance in American Higher Education

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Scope and Focus

• What makes U.S. higher education unique?
• What is the Triad’s role in higher education quality assurance?
• Who are the accreditors?
• What is the focus of accreditation?
• What are the disruptions in accreditation?
Distinctive Characteristics of U.S. Higher Education

Tension Between Individual and Common Good

Tuition

State Subsidy/ Federal Student Aid

Individual Good
Investment

Common
Good
Subsidy

Access

Affordability

Accountability

“How much of the cost of education should be borne by government, and how much by students and families?”

Ref: American Council on Education, 2004

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The Triad: Federal

Regional Accréditor

American Higher Education Triad

Federal

State
What does the U.S. Constitution say about education in America?

- Education not specifically mentioned as a federal responsibility
- Leave the responsibility to the states
- Private Colonial Colleges e.g. Harvard

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people”

Source: 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 1791
What does the U.S. Constitution say about education in America?

- Education not specifically mentioned as a federal responsibility
- Limited Access to Wealthy
- Private Colonial Colleges e.g. Harvard

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people”

Source: 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 1791
Major U.S. Federal Legislation & Higher Education

- Northwest Ordinance of 1787. First governmental document indicating the need for public education
- First & Second Morrill Act, 1862/1890. Democratized HE
- Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act, 1994. Native American Colleges and Universities
- National Science Foundation, 1950
- National Defense Education Act (NDEA) 1958. Focus on STEM and Language
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Major HE Federal Legislation


- **Economic Opportunity Act 1964, 1968, 1972**
  - TRIO Programs
  - Pell Grants

- **Title IX (1973).** Equal access for girls and women schools and Higher Education Act amended and reauthorized (‘80, ‘91, ’13).

“...Higher Education Act ... **covers how federal dollars are awarded to colleges and students**...touches on everything from loan limits to accreditation, determining who gets money, how much, and when...”

Ref: Chronicle of Higher Education, September 2013

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Major HE Federal Legislation


More of Society Gains Access

- Pell Grants


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Currently Operating Institutions of American Higher Education

Data from 2015 (NCES)

Ref: National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) 2017

First Glance

- 5,372 Institutions
- 6,893 Locations
- 55 Heightened Cash Monitoring 2

- 16,115,625 Degree-seeking undergraduates
- $127.25 B Title IV federal student aid volume

Accreditor Type
Scope of Recognition

- 39% Undergraduates receiving Pell
- 40% Undergraduates receiving federal loans (est.)
The Triad: State

Regional Accradiator

American Higher Education Triad

State

Federal

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Role of States in Higher Education

- Establish **policy and guidelines** for operating within the state (Licensure)
- **System control** in some cases
- Provide **financial support** state institutions
- “Consumer Protection” (Harkin, 2013)

“states have an **obligation** not only **to fund their systems of higher education adequately, but also to provide an explicit policy framework that informs and guides the actions of individual colleges and universities**”

Ref: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2003

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One Size Does Not Fit All

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Common Funding Issues

- Higher Education
- K-12 Schools
- Prisons
- Roads
- Medicaid
- Public Welfare
- Health & Hospitals
- Highways
- Governmental Administration

Which of these is not like the other?
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Tuition $ Fund
Much of HE

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“a regulatory framework with 50 varieties …cannot be efficient. …The fact is that…state laws and regulations have been sporadically enforced and frequently ignored, especially by traditional institutions working in multiple states.” Source: P. E. Lingenfelter (2011) President State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
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The Triad: Accreditation

Regional Accrgregator

American
Higher
Education Triad

Federal
State
American Accreditation

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

“A national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation, CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations.” Ref: http://www.chea.org/pdf/chea-at-a-glance_2012.pdf

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Role and Purpose of American Accreditation Agencies

• Assure Quality
• Address Issue of Accountability
• Ensure Access to Federal and State Funds
• Engender Private Sector Confidence
• Ease Transfer

“Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure quality to students and the public.” Ref: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012, p.4
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Underlying Principles of Accreditation

- HEIs have primary responsibility for academic quality; colleges and universities are the leaders and the key sources of authority in academic matters.
- Institutional mission drives academic quality.
- Institutional autonomy is essential to sustaining & enhancing academic quality.

“In the United States, accreditation is carried out by private, nonprofit organizations designed for this specific purpose.” Ref: Eaton, J. (2012) An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, CHEA, p. 3
Underlying Principles of Accreditation

• **Academic freedom** flourishes in an environment of academic leadership of institutions.

• Higher education enterprise and our society thrive on decentralization and diversity of institutional purpose and mission.

• Process (use of standards) leads to status.

“Accreditation...is a means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers.” Source: The Value of Accreditation. CHEA, 2010 pg. 3.
Regional Accrediting Agencies

Middle States Commission on Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

“Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Ref: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2011

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Accreditation Standards & Criteria

• Mission and Purpose
• Planning and Resource Allocation
• Holistic Student Learning and Assessment
• People and Governance
• Institutional Effectiveness and Quality Assurance

Similarities across regions
Components of Accreditation Evaluation Process

Self-Study
Peer-Review
Site Evaluation
Judgment by Agency
Periodic Review and Monitoring
Components of Accreditation Evaluation Process

Self-Study
Peer-Review
Accountability Achieved
Sit
Judgment by Agency
Periodic Review and Monitoring

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Components of Accreditation Evaluation Process

Self-Study

Peer-Review

Accountability Achieved (for the most part)

Site Evaluation

Judgment by Agency

Periodic Review and Monitoring

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Improving learning-assuring quality control

• Federal Government Rights and Responsibilities
  – setting rigorous qualifying standards for federal financial assistance and for enforcing them to prevent the victimization of students, fraud, and abuse of the public trust.
  – setting reasonable standards for the accrediting associations on which it relies to determine qualification for federal programs.”
Improving learning—assuring quality control

- State Government Rights and Responsibilities
  - Licensing and regulating the operation of all institutions.
  - Set clear state goals and plan, govern, and support higher education to achieve those goals.
  - Monitor general levels of academic attainment in its citizenry and the performance of college students and graduates in professional examinations and other capstone assessments.
Improving learning- assuring quality control

• Accrediting Agencies
  – Setting standards for institutional operations
  – Require institutions to examine their own effectiveness in light of their mission
  – Providing assistance and direction to institutions seeking self-improvement.
  – Promote and require more disciplined attention to student learning objectives & outcomes in institutions.

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Improving learning-assuring quality control

• Institutional Responsibilities
  – Create the necessary conditions and assure that faculty teach, conduct research, and establish and enforce standards of academic quality.
  – Define expected learning outcomes and assess their achievement by students for each academic program.

Ref: Roles and Responsibilities in Student Learning and Accreditation-Views from the State Higher Education Executive Officers – May 23, 2007
Trends in American HE

1. Sliding enrollment
2. Concerns about cost & access
3. Questions about value
4. Focus on careers and job placement
5. Declining state support
6. Collision over campus climate
7. Defense of academic freedom & free speech


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Disruption in U.S. Accreditation Space

• New and different oversight of accreditation
  – Federal Government has primary oversight of accreditation

• Different definitions of quality
  – Broad goals to narrow utilitarian/pragmatic focus

• Defining “for what and to whom is accreditation accountable”
  – Constituents (governments, public and students)

• Accreditation operation is no longer the same
  – Change from self and peer review to external validation of data

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March 2017

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Change in Focus

- Input
- Feedback
- Process
- Output

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Change in Focus

Accreditation focus on Inputs and Process

- Admissions
- Instruction & Program Integration
- Course Assessment
- Course & Program Completion

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Change in Focus

Accreditation focus on Inputs and Process

New Accreditation Focus Adds Outcomes and Value

Accreditation focus on Inputs and Process

Practical Outcomes - Gainful employment
Course & Program Completion
Course Assessment
Instruction & Program Integration
Admissions

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Gainful Employment Rule (In Limbo?)

• Original Purpose:
  – Preventing students from being buried in debt
  – More rigorous accountability than previous regulations
  – Providing transparency about student success
  – Improving student outcomes

• Revised Focus:
  – Protection from predatory practices (for-profits)
  – Keeping student debt affordable
  – Releasing the College Scorecard and Financial Aid Shopping Sheet

• Gainful Employment (Value of Education)

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Distinctive Characteristics of U.S. Higher Education

Political Pressure to Provide Individual ROI

Tuition

State Subsidy/ Federal Student Aid

Individual Good Investment

Common Good Subsidy

Access

Affordability

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Distinctive Characteristics of U.S. Higher Education

Political Pressure to Provide Individual ROI

It’s all about the JOB!

Tuition

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Individual Good Investment

Common Good Subsidy

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Thank You

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