Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Different approaches to QA
Day 3

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Key characteristics of US higher education

- Autonomy
- Self-regulation
- Diversity
- Integration
- Diversified financing
- Trust
# Structure of US education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># years</th>
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<th>PhD</th>
<th>Masters</th>
<th>Professional: Medicine, Law, Dentistry</th>
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<td>4-8</td>
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<td>University or College</td>
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- **Primary School**: 5 years
- **Middle School**: 3 years
- **High School**: 4 years
- **Community College**: 2 years
- **University or College**: 4 years
- **Masters**: 2 years
- **PhD**: 4-8 years

- **Professional**: Medicine, Law, Dentistry
US Higher Education

• Community Colleges
  – Mostly public
  – Private alternatives

• Liberal Arts Colleges
  – Mostly private

• Comprehensive Universities
  – Private and public

• Research Universities
  • Private and public
Government

• Ultimate responsibility for the management and performance of a university resides with a Board of Trustees
  – For public universities, the board is appointed by the state government
  – For private universities, the Board nominates its own members
  – Fixed period of service
Government

• Typically, Boards appoint the university president

• The University President is generally responsible for day to day operation of the university. (In recent years, fundraising has become a much bigger part of the job)

• Changes of policy and new initiatives have to be approved by the Board
Governance and regulation

• The government has very little authority over university activities
  – Not the number of years of study
  – Not the details of a course of study

• The US system is (in larger part) shaped by tradition
  – For example, it is effectively obligatory for a university professor to have PhD but there is no law requiring it
The origin of US accreditation: Mature system

• In 1906 the Assoc of American Universities and the Association of Land-grant colleges met in Massachusetts to begin to discuss common standards to define college level study

• In 1914, conversations began about a process for accrediting a university based on clearly defined admission and graduation requirements.
Loosely coupled oversight

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

State
Regional Associations
Professional Associations

University
## Characteristics of US Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accrediting Agency</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tr>
<td>No government participation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Based on trust and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant to the institution</td>
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<td>Integrated oversight of multiple agents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reports are confidential</td>
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University accreditation in the US is divided among six accrediting agencies.
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC): Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE)

- NEASC includes six states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
- There is a staff of six people who coordinate the accreditation for 200+ colleges and universities. Most of the work is done on a voluntary basis.
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC): Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE)

- The Commission is made up of 18 officials (typically university presidents, provosts or deans) who serve on a rotating basis
  - establish and update standards for evaluations
  - review evaluation and award accreditation
  - review institutions for membership
The Institutional Accreditation Process

• Self study (18-24 months)
  – Based on simple but fundamental questions
    • What are we doing?
    • How good are our results? (How do we know?)
    • What should we be doing differently?
• Peer evaluation
• Commission’s decision on accreditation
The Basis of Accreditation

• The institution has goals and activities appropriate for higher education
• The institution has the resources necessary to achieve those goals
• The institution is achieving those goals
• The institution has the capacity to continue achieving those goals
NEASC: “The Standards”

- Mission and Purpose
- Planning and evaluation
- Organization and governance
- Academic programs and instruction
- Faculty
- Students and services
- Library and information systems
- Physical and technological resources
- Financial Resources
- Public disclosure
- Integrity
Mission and Purpose

• The mission of the university
  – is appropriate for an institution of higher learning
  – defines the characteristics that distinguish this university from others
  – is the framework that governs priorities of the institution
  – is clear about which students are appropriate for the degree programs
  – is concrete, realistic, and within the possibilities of the institution’s resources
  – is clearly defined and communicated to the public and to serve as the basis of evaluation
Mission of Boston College

http://www.bc.edu/cwis/mission/mission.html
Who are the peer evaluators?

- Volunteers
  - Selected by NEASC staff on the basis of expertise
  - from similar institutions
  - who can be rejected by the institution being evaluated
Mostly, it works

• Done in good faith
• Shared goals
• Everyone values the process—it’s USEFUL
• The process and goals are clear
• Adapts to the needs of the institutions
  —Focused evaluations
Systems for Quality Assurance

• Despite 100 year history, the US system is still be criticized by one sector or another
So what do you think?

• What do you like about the US system?
• What don’t you like?
• What doesn’t make sense?
Argentina: A young system

• In 1995, a new law of higher education made the following processes obligatory:
  – Institutional evaluation (self study followed by peer evaluation) every six years
  – Annual institutional self study for new private universities
  – Accreditation of “regulated” undergraduate degrees (medicine, law, engineering, etc)
  – Accreditation of all graduate programs
Argentina: A young system

• The law established a new “independent” agency, the CONEAU, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, to coordinate all evaluations.

• The CONEAU is governed by a Board of educators and political appointments who serve rotating terms.
Argentina: A young system

- Institutional evaluations are required by law but there is no consequence for not doing it.
- Program accreditation is required for specific degree programs in order to be recognized as valid nationally.
- Accreditation is limited to programs with social impact and graduate programs.
Challenges

• Useful evaluation requires a capacity for collaboration within a university
• Self study requires a sense of “shared responsibility”
• The intensely political character of higher education impedes the trust essential to effective self study
  – Trust between universities and the government
  – Trust between peers
  – Trust within an institution
Challenges

When there is no trust, there is fear.

• People were not sure how the information compiled in the self study would be used by the university administration or the national government:

  “It was as though we put our head into the lion’s mouth.”
Challenges

- Isolation of schools and colleges from the university as a whole
- Lack of institutional identity or concept of “mission”
- Few full-time faculty with an institutional commitment beyond classroom teaching
- Lack of “shared responsibility”
- Lack of experience with peer collaboration
Challenges

• The situation was hampered by:
  – Rapid implementation without adequate orientation or training for:
    • the CONEAU
    • participants in self study
    • peer evaluators
    • the academic community as a whole
  – Lack of articulation between required evaluations
The Lessons of Inexperience

Reflections of participants in the coordination of the self study:

“Really, we were very disoriented. No one had a clear idea. No one had experience with this kind of thing

“We were the shipwrecked, rowing in the dark.”

“It’s been like tossing a child into the water to see if he will swim.”

“We might have worked a little more . . . so that everyone would have had the same concept of what we were going to do.”
Observations

• Argentina mimicked what was being done in other countries and this was not useful

• The process was not adequately understood by key actors prior to implementation

• The process of self study requires specific cultural and environmental conditions that are not present in Argentina

• Argentina needs to improve quality but quality has to be defined so that it has meaning for Argentina
Conclusions

For evaluation to have significant impact on institutional development:

- The process of self study needs to be understood
- Criteria need to be established that are appropriate to the current realities, limitations, and goals of higher education
- Mechanisms need to be developed to support the design of self study appropriate to the needs and mission of individual universities
Some unplanned outcomes

• Program accreditation became desirable as a result of failure . . .
So what do you think . . . ?

• Comments?
Systems for Quality Assurance

• There is no perfect system for quality assurance in higher education
• All healthy systems are continuously reflecting on their activities and reforming their operation and strategy
• Expectations of higher education are constantly increasing creating new challenges for how quality is defined
International Pressures

• Globalization and internationalization will put more pressure on individual nations
  – Develop QA programs that validate national academic activities
  – Conform to international practice and trends
Useful websites

• http://cihe.neasc.org/