Accreditation: Regaining Breath or Breathing its Last?

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Public Policy Expectations

- Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act retains role of accreditation largely unchanged
  - Heaviest new obligations for Title IV institutions tied to Title IV requirements, not accreditation

- Department of Education agenda is unfocused
  - Tardy in creating NACIQI; late appointment of Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education; shenanigans of the Inspector General

- Accountability continues to drive
  - Performance/National Goals/Cost; signals from negotiated rule-making; K-12 policies

- State Initiatives/SHEEO, NCHEMS, etc.
Accreditation as Public Policy Tool

- Long history of responsiveness to major public policy shifts (e.g., access, community colleges, off-campus/distance education, focus on diversity, etc.)
- Creative and largely healthy tensions between federal government expectations and agency independence
- Highly cost effective process for Title IV purposes
- Acceptance of quality assurance process by the general public and by multiple stakeholders.
- Fits with developments in international higher education quality assurance
- Support for institutional diversity
Fit for Public Purposes?

- Difficulty in being transparent, especially disclosure of reports, in age of accountability
- Minor involvement of some key stakeholders: employers, students, etc.
- Dogged by role in Title IV fraud and abuse of 1980s and early 90s
- Diffusion and lack of coordination of enterprise: regionals, nationals, specialized
- Poor fit of institutional model to blurring boundaries
- Capacity to understand for-profit models
- Small and undercapitalized
Regional Responses

• Major revision of standards and processes, 1999-2009
  • Standards with major focus on student learning/learning outcomes and institutional strategies for quality improvement; HLC’s unique criterion on service and engagement
  • Experimentation with process: SACS and QIP; WASC, Sr.’s two visit cycles; HLC and AQIP; NWCCU program just being rolled out

• Development with WCET of best practices in eLearning

• Explore capacity of C-RAC for cross-regional collaboration and voice

• Create/deliver workshops: assessment

• Seek to be D.C. player
State of Institutional Support?

- DC organizations concerned about federal influence through accreditation: 07 neg reg; CHEA Initiative, etc.
- Ambivalence about accreditation of new entities particularly for-profits with large online operations; acquisitions and mergers
- Strength of connectivity: how well does an agency listen?
- Patience with increased agency oversight of institutional changes as dictated by DOE?
  - Off-site education
  - Expansion of elearning
  - International ventures
  - Collaboratives and partnering
- Problems with boundaries and borders
- Pain in the neck or support for improvement?
Guessing about the Future

- Foundations (Gates, Lumina, etc.) and Governors will lead/prod significant changes (maybe a national qualifications framework?) Obama “kitchen cabinet” on education
- Scaling will be a major challenge: needed to meet national goals but embraced primarily by for-profits and supported by venture capitalists (who will partner?)
- Insularity of regional agencies hinder coordinated responsiveness and taxes their credibility
- Required tools for accountability will emerge
- Inertia is powerful when no attractive option is presented; one saleable idea could lead to reconfiguration of the U.S. quality assurance system
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