

**Innovative Practices in the Accreditation Process—
The ACBSP Path**

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Introducing Douglas Viehland

**Mr. Douglas Viehland, CAE
Executive Director
Accreditation Council for Business Schools and
Programs
11520 West 119th Street
Overland Park, Kansas 66213 USA
phone: 913-339-9356
dviehland@acbsp.org**

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ABSTRACT: Since 2003, the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs has been on a path of innovation with regard to the accreditation process. It remains on that path in 2014. This paper will explore the rationale for these actions that led ACBSP from an organization with 370 members in 2003 to over 1,220 campuses in 56 different countries in 2014. This includes adopting an existing quality standard used by businesses, creating a system-wide accreditation process for large systems, and a cohort process for a group of ten schools in Mongolia. This is in addition to innovative processes that support success such as mentors, site team consensus calls, and sharing of self-studies with candidates for accreditation.

Innovation in Staff Leadership

Prior to 2003, ACBSP employed a model followed by other accrediting bodies and education organizations. The executive director is responsible for accreditation and the management of the association. For ACBSP, this person was expected to have a Ph.D. in an academic field related to business.

In an act of innovation, the leadership in mid-2002 changed away from this pattern. Instead, they created two staff leadership positions, one for the executive director with experience in association management and one for the director of accreditation who would have a background in teaching in a business school and in accreditation or related processes.

Creating Individual Member Benefits

In September 2003 ACBSP created a hybrid membership format of the two types of associations. When the business unit became a member, everyone involved in the delivery of business education was extended individual membership. This includes the director/rector/president/chancellor, chief academic officer, head of the business unit, and all faculty.

An array of individual member benefits are now provided to over 11,000 individuals.

Creating a Link to an International Quality Standard

For several years prior to 2003, ACBSP maintained two paths to achieve accreditation for baccalaureate/graduate degree accreditation.

Rather than just retain the current outcomes assessment process, the innovative practice was to model a new process on an existing quality standard Education Criteria for Performance Excellence used by the Baldrige National Quality Program and to write criteria for how a business school could demonstrate they meet each standard.

By adopting this standard, ACBSP schools were able to demonstrate to businesses and health care entities that the accreditation process is based on a process they use to measure and demonstrate quality.

While the Baldrige program is a USA centric program, there now exists in most countries a government or chamber of commerce or quality association that has a similar process and a similar award.

Members Assisting Members in the Accreditation Process--Mentors

Upon entering candidacy, a school is assigned a mentor. The assignment is made in consultation with the business school and is not made without the involvement of the candidate school.

The mentor will have extensive experience with the accreditation process including preparing a self-study, conducting a site visit to a campus which involved reading self-studies from other schools, and attendance at ACBSP education programs related to mentor service.

Mentors used in India and Africa are often individuals that are from the respective country and possibly served in faculty roles prior to their role as Dean or faculty member in the United States at an ACBSP accredited school.

Members Assisting Members in the Accreditation Process— Sharing of Self-Studies

Completion of a preliminary questionnaire or self-study can be a daunting task, even with the assistance of a mentor. An innovative practice implemented includes providing a copy of a completed self-study or preliminary questionnaire to a candidate that is beginning the process.

This begins with the Board of Commissioners and staff identifying outstanding self-studies that have been completed and submitted. The school submitting the self-study is then asked permission to share with other schools after propriety and confidential information is removed.

The intent is not for the candidate to copy what is presented in the self-study but to stimulate thought processes for review and responding to the criteria.

Innovating the Accreditation Process-- Use of Data from the Regional Accreditation Process

For schools located in the United States, to be eligible for membership they must be affiliated with an educational institution that has achieved regional accreditation. Often the educational institution is in the process of reaffirming their regional accreditation at the time they are pursuing ACBSP accreditation.

In an innovative practice, ACBSP now accepts data submitted as part of the data prepared for reaffirmation of regional accreditation for selected tables.

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Innovating the Accreditation Process-- Continuous Improvement Processes for the Accreditation Process

It may be obvious and less innovative but still important for ACBSP as an accrediting body that requires continuous improvement as part of the accredited process to also have continuous improvement as part of our processes, but this did not always occur. This is done by asking the school being accredited to evaluate the performance of each team, each site team member, and the mentor. The mentor and each team member are asked to suggest improvements in the process and often the performance of each team member and chair.

At the ACBSP Annual Conference each year there is a group discussion with mentors and staff to review possible improvements in the process.

Innovating the Accreditation Process-- A Training Program That Builds on Experience

In a longstanding innovative practice the selection of each team focuses on experience of each team member. Each team of three members includes as the chair a person who has been on numerous visits as a team member, a second team member that has been on several visits and may eventually be offered the opportunity to chair a team and a rookie member who often has not been on a visit or one or two.

This assures a process to advance team members based on experience and number of visits.

Innovating the Accreditation Process-- Consensus Phone Call for Site Team Members

A recent innovation and came directly from the continuous improvement process ACBSP undertakes on a continual basis. Each site visit team is required to conduct a conference call prior to the site visit to a campus. Prior to the call, the team members are expected to have read the self-study and bring to the call their concerns and questions. This allows the team to begin the process of becoming a team well in advance of their arrival on campus.

Quite often as a result of this consensus call, a request is made back to the candidate school to request data or supplemental information and to have it prepared and ready for review by the team prior to or upon their arrival.

System Wide Accreditation

Since its establishment, ACBSP has had a campus based membership. In 2007 several large systems had one member in membership but had not entered the accreditation process because of the cost for membership and the precedent of visiting all campuses. This included University of Phoenix, Webster University, and DeVry University/Keller Graduate School of Management.

A taskforce that year began the process of reviewing changes to the process for membership and accreditation that would permit all campuses to enter membership and be accredited without these existing barriers.

Several key changes were proposed and adopted. All have subsequently joined and entered the accreditation process.

Cohort Process for Membership and Accreditation

Building on the success of other innovations, the latest innovation was started in 2011 and is currently underway in Mongolia. It combines the innovation of a system wide process with other innovations such as a sharing of mentors.

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Cohort Process for Membership and Accreditation--Dues

The Mongolian National Council for Education Accreditation (MNCEA) is seeking to document and advance the quality of education delivered by business schools in Mongolia. ACBSP has an agreement with the MNCEA that outlines a process by which up to ten schools could enter the accreditation process at the same time.

The dues amount calculation is the same as used for system wide with the lead campus paying the full amount and the remaining members of the cohort group paying one-half. For a cohort group there is no main campus. Each campus pays \$742.50 instead of \$1,350.

One invoice is sent to MNCEA. MNCEA collects all the funds from the individual schools and sends one wire transfer.

Cohort Process for Membership and Accreditation—Candidacy for Accreditation

Each campus enters candidacy for accreditation as individual campuses by each campus paying the candidacy fee which is different from system wide accreditation where one fee is paid for all campuses.

Each campus will prepare separate preliminary questionnaires and self-study but they will do it in a cohort model, meeting and sharing information regarding how each is responding to the information requested. MNCEA staff is available to help facilitate this process.

Cohort Process for Membership and Accreditation—Appointment of Mentors

There are ten campuses in the first cohort group. These ten campuses are sharing the services and costs of four mentors with two mentors working with the six smaller private schools, one mentor working with the two large private universities, and one mentor working with the two large public universities.

This is a savings to the schools given the high cost of travel to Mongolia and consistent with the spirit of creating a cohort group. The mentors benefit in that they are able to more quickly understand the educational delivery process in Mongolia by viewing the data input on the questionnaire of several schools rather than one.

Cohort Process for Membership and Accreditation—Special Support

- The standards and criteria have been translated to Mongolian.
- Given the low level of assessment of learning outcomes currently being conducted, ACBSP has identified a valued partner that is making the investment to create assessment instruments translated to Mongolian. Peregrine Academic Services will enable this cohort group and others to make peer review comparisons of assessment outcomes in a confidential and collaborative process.
- On two occasions, ACBSP staff members, mentors, and Peregrine Academic Services traveled to Ulaanbaatar to conduct a two day training seminar combined with mentor visits to each school. Over 100 persons from government agencies and the ten schools were in attendance. Press coverage on television and in the newspaper was extensive and positive.