International Accreditation: Are We There Yet?

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Abstract. With the increasing internationalization of higher education and the explosion in the number of students and faculty studying, researching, and teaching outside of their home countries, global standards for educational quality control have become an imperative. The most effective approach to quality control within institutions of higher education, the paper argues, is voluntary accreditation—periodic internal reviews that are externally validated. Accreditation is a uniquely American creation, but it is gaining currency in other countries as well. The paper discusses the potential benefits of international accreditation, which would facilitate collaboration between accredited universities located in different countries. The practice of accreditation is contrasted with the practice of ranking, which is presented as a commercial exercise that does a poor job of measuring the actual institutional quality and that is ultimately based on the personal opinions of the people doing the ranking. Finally, the potential challenges that international accreditation faces (including unwillingness of the creators of the current quality industry to yield power to a global accreditation agency, among other things) are presented as temporary obstacles.
Keywords: globalization, international accreditation, rankings, student mobility, study abroad, internationalization, quality assurance.

Has the time come for us to have a truly internationalized accreditation movement? My goal is to offer a commentary and then open it up for conversation, and I hope you will all respond to the question.

In doing so, I will briefly reflect on global changes in higher education and their implications. Then I will focus on a comparative analysis of rankings and accreditations. I will conclude with the following question: are we at the juncture where we can begin serious discussion about building a world accreditation infrastructure?

Most higher education students or scholars can provide a list of 7 to 10 forces within and around higher education that are impacting and shaping colleges and universities. Increasing costs, increasing tuition elasticity, changing sources of revenue, entrepreneurialism, access,

Forces in Higher Education

Figure 1. **Forces Shaping the Landscape**

affordability, accountability, technology, MOOCs, globalization, un-funded government mandate, privatization of higher education and curricular issues are only a few of these forces.

However, only two of these forces are of importance to me, at least with regard to internationalizing quality: technology and globalization (see Figure 1). These two forces have a tremendous impact on higher education worldwide. They compel institutions to become globally oriented and make it possible for institutions to respond to the needs of an increasingly global society. These needs include preparing students to become global scholars who will eventually become global leaders.

Technology in Higher Education

I intend to focus more on globalization than technology partially because we have been talking about technology for a long time. We have more conferences devoted to technology than globalization because the technology industry, with its billions of dollars, has the wherewithal to promote interest in technology. My interest in technology lies in the extent to which it accelerates globalization.

You probably do not expect a definition of technology; by now we all assume we know what it is. However, given the unique focus that I have and the fact that technology itself has changed tremendously since the antediluvian era, it makes sense for me to share my definition. I see technology as a human-made means for furthering production and for enabling human beings to become somewhat "omniscient" and "omnipresent." The oldest and most common part of the definition is technology as a means for furthering production. That remains true today. Technology helps us to produce more efficiently and accomplish tasks more effectively irrespective of the sector: transportation, exploration, industrialization, agriculture, communication and so on.

Advancements in technology related to the growing miniaturization of computers and the integration of functions in a magnitude that couldn't have been imagined 100 years ago have had significant re-

sultant effects. One of these effects is the capacity of human beings to possess knowledge about almost anything and everything that has been known to humankind. Access to information about anything anywhere is made possible by the fact that we now have more electronic information than printed. Fifty years ago, even the richest scholar couldn't have traveled to all the libraries in the world to consult with all the books in the world. But today, you can stand here and access the US Library of Congress and with permission access almost any online library in the world. Most of us take this capacity for granted, but the capacity to know and access all that has been known propels us toward becoming more "omniscient".

The second part is the capacity to be present somewhere beyond one's physical location (omnipresent). As I stand herein front of you, it is possible through the power of technology go back to my house in the US and, using this iPhone, take a tour of my house to see if there are any intruders, if my lights are left on and take any actions I desire. I can have conversation with colleagues in China, Romania, Turkey (as I frequently do) or anywhere else and they can show me things that they want me to see and I can interact with them in real time. We are atthe bottom of the ocean exploring nature previously hidden from human eyes. We are on planets millions of miles away observing the wonders of the universe.

These two resultant effects of technology, "omniscience" and "omnipresence," have huge implications for higher education even though higher education is somewhat slow in responding to them. Nevertheless, technology is revolutionizing our pedagogies and curricula. Everything that your students can access using their handheld devices has become part of their basic knowledge or information, and I know there are those who would take issue with me using knowledge and information almost interchangeably. But if your students can "Google" it, it is no longer important for educators to teach it, whatever "it" may be. What is necessary is for educators to teach students how to use the information. Hence, a university is no longer a place where students go to access data/information but where the application of information is developed. This point is critical, but in the interest of time, I will leave the subject for future conferences.

Globalization

There are many definitions of globalization in the literature and on the Internet that are influenced by sectoral perspectives. People involved in producing technology have their own definitions, while the business sector has its own. People working on human security have their own definitions, and so do the people working on financial securities.

For the purpose of this keynote, I define globalization as perforated and porous national borders and the integration and intermingling of opportunities and challenges with increasingly less respect for geopolitical boundaries. It is the "flattening" of the world (in deference to

Thomas Friedman), in the process of which political borders are becoming increasingly less relevant. I am aware of the ideological debates regarding globalization and that some see it as a neo-hegemonic movement, the westernization of the world, the marketization of the economy, and a threat to or death of local cultures. Whichever perspective one adopts, the reality of porous borders is undeniable, as Ebola has recently reminded the US government.

Before I left the US, the first contracted case of Ebola was announced, and I have just heard yesterday of a second case. I also discovered this morning that the second nurse was my former student worker whose mother was my secretary at Kent State. The appearance of Ebola in the US raises the question of how to close our borders to keep the disease out. Of course, there are those whose worldview is so narrow and misinformed that they think that this is a viable possibility. Reasonable and informed minds understand that diseases no longer have respect for borders, that our economies are now integrated, that technology has flattened the world and that global warming is everyone's problem. They know that the world has shrunk become a much smaller place than it used to be.

Globalization in Higher Education

So what does this mean for higher education? Higher education lags behind the business world in responding to the forces of globalization, even though the higher education sector has always engaged in international activities. I define globalization in higher education as a transnational philosophy and process of knowledge generation, transmission and application that reorients the knowledge industry as a producer of globally-competent scholars and professionals who are capable of redefining local problems and solutions in the global context and vice versa. On many campuses, responses to globalization have yet to become an institutional philosophy that drives institutional processes in spite of the fact that, as I have said before, higher education institutions have always participated in international activities. To the extent that higher education institutions are not producing globally competent graduates with transnational perspectives, transcultural skills and transdisciplinary backgrounds, higher education is not responding strategically to globalization and the needs of the 21st century environment. The goal of our institutions today must be to produce individuals who are capable of defining local issues and solutions in the context of global issues and solutions and vice versa.

Implications of Globalization for Higher Education

Whatever our stance on globalization, there are basic assumptions and implications that are difficult to refute. One who denies that globalization is a reality must be living in a cave somewhere outside our planet. The global economy and the rise of the market sector economy are part of the evidence of our global society. If we consider two

graduates who have comparable credentials with the exception of global experience, employers will favor the one with global experience in the business, technology, medical, military, and even NGO sectors.

Given this reality, a growing number of students will study in more than one institution before they complete their baccalaureate education; more and more students study in more than one nation, as data from Erasmus and Socrates reveal; and an increasing number of students will study more than one discipline. Therefore, transnational education will become a defining cutting edge for institutions and for individuals with college education. We should expect, then, a continuing growth in the number of international partnerships and consortia among higher education institutions across the world.

Institutions will put more emphasis on global learning. The current touristic study abroad programs will become inferior to innovative, global, civically engaged education. I strongly believe that the current study abroad model in the US and Europe is quickly becoming obsolete. A typical American student has little or nothing to learn culturally on the streets of London, yet over 53% of our study abroad participants go to Europe with the United Kingdom having the largest share. With the exception of language differences, Moscow offers the same lifestyle as Paris or New York, forcing us to question the degree to which a study abroad in these cities are culturally transforming for American students. Of course, I wholeheartedly support student exchange. However, I believe that the frontiers for innovative study abroad programs that will produce the necessary culture shocks and growth for any profession in a global society are in the developing countries.

As institutions become more globally oriented, the question of student and faculty mobility will force conversations regarding quality. These conversations have already begun.

Evidence of Globalization in Higher Education

Fifty years ago, only a lunatic would have predicted that a day would come when universities across the globe would be subjected to a ranking exercise. The degree to which we have now become comfortable with the idea of world rankings and accepted their results, as evidenced by the generous references from colleagues at this conference, is alarming. I know enough to say that rankings are here to stay and we will see more ranking exercises by and by partly because they appeal to human psychology and provide simplistic solutions similar to marketing gimmicks. Erasmus and Socrates are European creations invented with globalization in mind. According to OECD data, the number of students who are studying outside their countries has continued to increase:

- Between 2000 and 2011, the number of international students has more than doubled. Today, almost 4.5 million tertiary students are enrolled outside their country of citizenship.

http://vo.hse.ru/en/

- The largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea. Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad worldwide.
- New players have emerged on the international education market in the past decades, such as Australia, New Zealand, Spain, the Russian Federation and, more recently, Korea. By contrast, the share of international students in some of the most attractive countries—Germany and the United States, for instance—has declined.
- As countries increasingly benefit from student mobility, the competition to attract and retain students has diversified the map of destinations over the past decade[1].

Figure 2 is a summary of over 60 years of growth in international student enrollment in the US. Notice the sharp increases every ten years and the increase in the proportion of the total student enrollment in the US.

A cursory review of mission statements of institutions reveals that a growing number of institutions are including words such as "global" or "international" in their mission statements. I predict more institutions will do so in the coming years. I have already mentioned the fact that international partnerships will increase among institutions and the number of joint degree programs will continue to rise. The number of students studying abroad will also continue to increase.
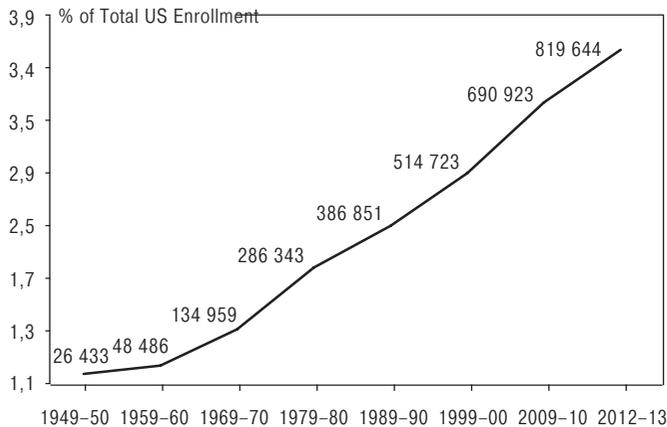
Figure 3 provides a summary of about 10 years of growth in study abroad participation in the US. This number will continue to increase over the foreseeable future.

Hitherto, we have talked about study abroad for students. Internationalization will be expanded to include teaching abroad experiences for faculty. The number of international faculty or professors will increase as universities realize that a credible university draws talents from all over the world. Of course, the number of international conferences will continue to rise as well as the number of curricular agreements and articulations. Institutions will collaborate creatively and satellite campuses will spring up across borders as governments liberalize restrictions and control. As we have seen in China and India, governments will welcome the private higher education sector and open doors to internationally recognized institutions.

Judging from the past 10 years around the globe, American-type universities operating in English, offering a liberal arts education, and implementing the credit system will continue to grow in popularity. All these developments will force greater conversations and discourse regarding international quality assurance in higher education.
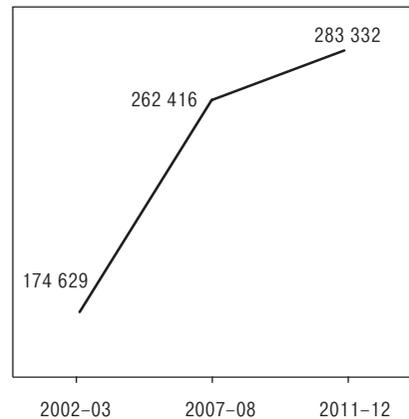
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[1] http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202013—N°14%20%28eng%29-Final.pdf

Figure 2. **Interntional Student Enrollment (US)**

% of Total US Enrollment

819 644	
690 923	
514 723	
386 851	
286 343	
134 959	
26 433 48 486	

3,9
3,4
3,5
2,9
2,5
1,7
1,3
1,1

1949–50 1959–60 1969–70 1979–80 1989–90 1999–00 2009–10 2012–13

Source: http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment-Trends/1948-2012

Figure 3. **Study Abroad Participation (US)**

283 332

262 416

174 629

2002–03   2007–08   2011–12

Source: http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data

Shifting Factors in Internationalization

International activities are not new. They are as old as the creation of nation-states. However, the reasons for engaging in these activities are changing. Once upon a time, people engaged in cross-border activities enchanted by the exotic and the mysterious. There were those who crossed borders to convert the heathens. There were those who did so to learn more about the enemies of the state or to expand the influence of one nation over the other. Professor David Ricardo (1772–1823), the English political economist, taught us about the power of comparative advantage in economics by which nations benefit from specialization and have the incentive to trade freely. There have also been people who crossed borders to enhance their nationalistic agenda, while others crossed to exploit for profit.

These reasons are still present to some extent today, but there are new reasons emerging for border crossing. There is a growing desire for mutual understanding of the world and acceptance of our collective purpose and common destiny. The European Union is an experiment of a world with open borders. Today, closed borders are either a punitive action imposed externally (as is the case with North Korea) or necessitated by war (as was the case in Afghanistan).

There is a growing realization that we belong to a single ecosystem and the only intelligent response to climate issues and pollution is a global approach. We have already talked about the increasingly integrated world economies. A person who studies the Russian economy or the US economy in isolation is badly educated and poorly prepared for the 21st century environment. The need for global leadership in the business sector and in the civic sector compels transnational activities. While the global market presents global opportunities for

businesses, global leaders understand that good profit comes with social responsibilities for the whole world.

Approaches to Quality Assurance

Educators have never been oblivious to matters of quality as some would like us to believe. Whoever puts together curriculum, hires faculty or recruits students is responding or alluding to an assumed quality. What *is* new is the demand for public demonstration or declaration of quality. The three common approaches used for demonstrating quality in higher education, one of which is the appointment of quality czars common in European countries. Some institutions have quality assurance officers that serve as quality policemen and women. Many countries are subject to the control of their ministries of education, which is the second approach. The hope is that these government ministries are capable of providing the necessary supervision and quality assurance for higher education institutions. The third approach, a uniquely American approach but one growing in popularity elsewhere, is voluntary accreditation. Thevoluntary accreditation process is a periodic internal review that is externally validated within the higher education sector in the US.

Internationalizing Accreditation

Very recently, we have begun to witness scattered efforts to internationalize accreditation in various sectors. The International Accreditation Service was set up to attest to operational quality in the business sector (www.iasonline.org). AACSB, a US-based accreditation agency for the business disciplines is one of the first to offer its services internationally (www.aacsb.edu/en/accreditation). The Western Association of Schools and Colleges is the closest thing to international accreditation in the higher education sector (www.wascsenior.org/resources/international). Accreditation International provides quality assurance for K-14 schools and non-degree granting institutions (www.iao.org). According to its website, the International Accreditation and Recognition Council (IARC) also provides international accreditation for post-secondary education and vocational education (www.iarcedu.com/default.aspx). International Accreditation Organization (IAO) states that it is working to improve quality in educational institutions(www.iao.org).

Many of these organizations areoutside the US. Their processes are difficult to determine and their impact isdifficult to verify. This raises another question: who accredits the accreditors? In the US, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is established to do just that for the higher education sector. See www.chea.org.

Benefits of Accreditation

Experience from the US has shown that when done effectively, accreditation is a powerful means of improving and assuring institution-

al quality because it focuses the attention of institutional leaders and stakeholders on quality factors: curriculum, faculty, resources, mission, etc. Accreditation also focuses attention on external factors that impact an institution's ability to be effective. The accreditation exercise raises the question of whether ministries of education with their bureaucracy area hindrance or helper for institutional effectiveness.

While many countries have opened their doors to the private higher education sector, most of these countries have not created an environment that will enable this sector to thrive and flourish. For example, in China, the system of sending the best students to the highest-ranked public institutions is not helpful for the private higher education sector. In Kazakhstan, the private higher education sector is forced to generate 90 percent of its revenue from tuition only, thus stultifying creative, entrepreneurial activities. The accreditation system is a powerful means for validating the private sector in countries new to the private sector and for forcing discussion about the environment within which the institutions operate.

Accredited institutions have greater confidence and incentives to collaborate in creative ways. International accreditation will also benefit institutions in developing countries. The resultant effect of this type of collaboration for institutions in developing countries is enhanced quality as these institutions partner with their counterparts in developed countries and enhanced opportunities for civic engagement and experiential education.

The Challenges of Accreditation

Accreditation is not without its criticisms. Some of these criticisms are related to misunderstandings of the term and its operations. There are those who confuse accreditation with government approval to establish an institution. Government approval to establish an educational institution is simply a legal mandate to operate as a legitimate entity. Also, accreditation is seen by some as a means of granting approval for maintaining the minimum standards acceptable. Every once in a while, politicians take on higher education with the hope of radically reforming it. Often, these politicians criticize accreditation as a mere pat-on-the-back by peers for non-outcome related activities.

Even within higher education itself, accreditation is sometimes criticized for "too much work," "bean counting," "producing huge documents only to placate accreditors" and so on.

The US Department of Education provides a definition of accreditation that emphasizes quality maintenance, while the Public Health Accreditation Board provides a definition that emphasizes the progressive improvement agenda:

• Accreditation is the recognition that an institution maintains standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials

for professional practice. The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality[2].

According to the Public Health Accreditation Board, accreditation in public health is:

- The measurement of health department performance against a set of nationally recognized, practice-focused and evidenced-based standards.
- The issuance of recognition of achievement of accreditation within a specified time frame by a nationally recognized entity.
- The continual development, revision, and distribution of public health standards.

    The goal of the voluntary national accreditation program is to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing the quality and performance of Tribal, state, local, and territorial public health departments.

    PHAB's public health department accreditation process seeks to advance quality and performance within public health departments. Accreditation standards define the expectations for all public health departments that seek to become accredited. National public health department accreditation has been developed because of the desire to improve service, value, and accountability to stakeholders[3].

The old ways of accrediting institutions could fairly be described as approving institutions that met the minimum requirements for accreditation by the accrediting agency. However, the new approach to accreditation and reaccreditation focuses on an improvement plan that is voluntarily developed and publicly declared by the institution. It is no longer sufficient for an institution to meet the minimum requirements; institutions seeking accreditation must demonstrate their plan for future excellence.

It is also important to point out the fact that the new approach to accreditation seeks evidential demonstration of institutional practices. The old practice of making spurious claims that are unsubstantiated by facts and unascertainable through audits is no longer an acceptable accreditation/reaccreditation practice.

Given what we know about good accreditation processes and what they can do for higher education, why are rankings getting all the attention and why has the idea of international accreditation been slow to develop?

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[2] http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/faqaccr.aspx

[3] http://www.phaboard.org/accreditation-overview/what-is-accreditation/

Experience with rankings has not shown that we will reap from them the same benefits that we derive from accreditation. Figure 4 provides a summary of the comparison between rankings and accreditation. While the purpose of accreditation is a continuous, incremental improvement of institutional processes, the only purpose of rankings is to provide a bragging right—of course, with the added benefit of selling products such as magazines and commercials.

Both rankings and accreditation are done at the academic program level as well as the institutional level. However, given their commercial interest, rankings are carried out annually while accreditations are typically multi-year: 3, 5, 7, or 10 years. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association came up with AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program) a while ago, which requires institutions to identify quality improvement goals with an annual progress report.

Accreditation is largely voluntary, although, in the US, nonparticipation prevents an institution from accessing government funds, student aid and benefit from public recognition. Rankings, on the other hand, are forced exercises in that there are ranking agencies that either forcefully rank institutions or leave them with deleterious effects of non-inclusion. As we say in the US, "you're damned if you do and damned if you don't". The desire to participate in ranking is based on the assumption that bad publicity is better than no publicity at all. Ranking agencies know this and they take full advantage of it.

So who are the actors behind rankings and accreditation? Given the power of rankings and the inability of institutions to challenge ranking agencies successfully, some of us refer to them as "the small gods of higher education". I doubt any institution would sue them even if they thought they had been poorly ranked. We all know that the criteria used are faulty and simplistic at best and that changes in these criteria produce different results.

In an article published a while ago, I examined the criteria used by the US News and World Report by correlating institutional performances on these criteria with institutional wealth, defined as endowment size and other institutional characteristics (http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09513540510607716). The result was not surprising—the wealthier an institution is, the more likely the institution will rank higher on financially sensitive criteria. I concluded by noting that what is being ranked is not quality but the amount of resources institutions have. The problem with the common criteria used in rankings lies in the fact that many of them are cost-inducing; that is, the more institutions pursue them, the more costs they incur. Accreditation, on the other hand, depends on peer reviews. Some accrediting agencies such as the Higher Learning Commission of NCA do an excellent job of training those interested in serving as evaluators.

The processes of accreditation and reaccreditation are long, meticulous, and arduous. Institutional accreditation/reaccreditation takes

at least a year to prepare for and involves hundreds of hours of meetings, extensive gathering of data and many hours of writing. By contrast, when I was a provost, the US News and World Report sent me a questionnaire with hundreds of institutions listed, many that I truly know little or nothing about but was expectedto rank on some complex variables. How the end product could be valid beats my imagination.

Financially speaking, ranking processes are inexpensive. They only involve taking the time to develop questionnaires, collect the data and crank out the results. But accreditation that takes a whole year and hundreds of pieces of input across the campus is much more expensive, not to mention the fee paid to the accrediting agency and the expenses of hosting the visiting team. In the long run, however, rankings could be more expensive as they force institutions to chase after criteria that are cost-inducing and merely tangential to true quality.

The extent to which rankings alter institutional behaviors is debatable but some of us fear that if any changes occur at all, it may not necessarily be for the best. I suspect that the institutions most affected by rankings (and thus most inclined to alter their behaviors) are middle-ranked institutions, whose leaders believe that with extra efforts they could be bumped up the ladder. Institutions at the top are unperturbed, while those at the bottom with less resources are unconvinced of the efficacy of the ranking rubrics.

The power of accreditation lies in its sensitivity to the mission of an institution. A technical college is different from a doctoral-research institution and even when the same set of standards is used, they are tailored to respond to the mission and needs of the institutions. This is not the case with rankings, even though the US News and World Report will claim that by categorizing institutions as national, regional, liberal arts and so on, differences in mission have been minimized. An examination of the list will confirm the error in their thinking. For example, Rowan University in New Jersey and Arcadia University in Pennsylvania are two institutions with different mission, but the US News and World Report regardless classifies them as regional universities.

The ultimate basis of ranking is personal opinion of institution or a program about which the ranker may know little or nothing. Unlike ranking, accreditation is based on evidence. It is not sufficient for an institution to claim that X is being done. The institution must show with well-documented evidence that X is in fact being done.

Challenges to Internationalizing Accreditation

As I conclude this keynote, let me quickly summarize what I see as the main challenges to the global accreditation effort. The first is ignorance, and where there is ignorance, there is always fear of the unknown. Some people expressed fear as the European Union was deliberating on Erasmus and Socrates. Free trade and open borders are tormenting concepts to some, and these individuals will view the idea of an international body accrediting their institutions with skepticism.

Figure 4. **Rankings vs Accreditation**

Factors	Rankings	Accreditation
Purpose	Bragging Right, Selling Products	Continuous Incremental Improvement
Scale/Scope	Academic Program/Institutional	Academic Program/Institutional
Period	Annually	3, 5, 7, or 10; (AQIP)
Participation	Forced (Damn if you do/donot)	Voluntary with a catch
Actors	"Small gods"	Peers (peer review)
Process	Questionnaires, phone calls, or the use of Quality Surrogates	Self Study, Campus Visitation, Follow-up Actions, Approval
Cost	Cheap	Expensive (Time)
Differentiation	Indifferent to Mission/Process	Mission Specific, Process Validating
Basis	Impression/Opinion	Evidentially Based

Beyond the fear of what might or might not happen is the politics of control—who will control the international accrediting body?—and beyond the politics of control are the logistics: in the US, we have five regional accreditation agencies working with over 4,000 institutions. Each agency works with institutions within their regions, and they will be the first to acknowledge the amount of work involved.

In addition, developing acceptable standards across the globe will be challenging because of the differences in roles of and expectations for higher education systems in different countries. Some may also resist international accreditation efforts simply because of their past experiences with poorly designed accreditation exercises. Finally and closely related to the politics of control is the fact that the inventors of the status quo—the system-keepers, the preservers of the current quality industry—will not give up without a fight; neither would the rankers be jubilant in welcoming a truly quality-oriented international endeavor.

However, these challenges are not insurmountable. If AACSB is already accrediting business programs overseas, it shows that it is doable logistically. The Association of Classical Universities of Russia has been working on developing standards for the purpose of providing accreditation services beyond Russia. The Association for the Global Universities and Colleges (AGAUC) has been discussing the necessity and logistics of having a global accreditation system. I am optimistic that the movement has begun and the conversation has at least gotten started.