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Ongoing quality improvement is often described as a journey. Upon achieving accreditation of its programs by the AACSB International, Rowan University engaged in an introspective analysis of their quality improvement journey. They sought to identify and document those factors that played a critical role in their success in attaining initial AACSB accreditation. The following essay describes their experience. It is hoped that their story will identify elements that might assist other colleges and universities in similar efforts.

Unpacking a Successful Journey to AACSB Accreditation

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This story began in 1991 when a local industrialist endowed a small state college with one of the largest gifts ever given to a state-funded institution. Within five years, and with the stroke of several legislative pens, Glassboro State College was renamed Rowan University and began a journey to the next level. The symbols of institutional transformation were abundant. Two new colleges materialized, a doctoral program was initiated, new buildings were erected, and colorful institutional robes emerged at graduation. Scott and Meyer (1991) suggest that individual organizations must conform to elaborate rules and institutional scripts to achieve legitimacy. In the case of the College of Business at Rowan, legitimacy at the next level meant becoming accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

As conversations about accreditation requirements began, it quickly became clear that faculty life was about to change. Most COB faculty members were long-term members of the campus community. Success at this comprehensive institution had been based largely on quality teaching and abundant service. Research activities were often viewed as inessential to a successful academic career, and, in some cases,

faculty members who engaged in research were even viewed with suspicion. When the criteria for becoming AACSB accredited became clear, this COB faculty learned the reality of moving to the next level at this changing institution would involve adding successful scholarly activities to faculty performance expectations.

Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. On November 15, 2002, AACSB conferred initial accreditation on the COB. In an effort to ascertain what critical milestones contributed to this successful outcome, the COB engaged Edith Rusch, then associate professor of educational leadership within the College of Education (and the co-author of this essay), to undertake a study that might both memorialize the factors that were crucial in the achievement of AACSB accreditation and identify elements that might assist other colleges and universities in similar efforts.

In order to capture the full experience of the accreditation process, Dr. Rusch and her graduate assistant undertook a case study that examined faculty perceptions of the accreditation effort. The study was initiated with a review of all pertinent accreditation documents and a two-hour interview with the dean. Based on the initial data, the researchers designed a two-page

questionnaire with a combination of open-ended and Likert-scale questions, which was sent to 30 full-time faculty, five professional staff, and eight retired faculty in the College of Business. The questions probed faculty perceptions of: (1) the likelihood of achieving AACSB accreditation when the process was first started and after a mock accreditation visit was conducted; (2) factors deemed critical to successful outcomes; (3) short- and long-term benefits of the accreditation process; (4) costs and benefits of attaining AACSB accreditation; and (5) advice they would provide to other institutions aspiring to AACSB accreditation.

Next, the researchers used the response data from 27 individuals to construct an interview protocol. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with two members of each academic specialization (Accounting, Finance, Management, Management Information Systems, and Marketing), one highly involved in the accrediting process, and one less involved. A snowball process identified five additional interviewees. Finally, data were coded and analyzed using demographic data about length of service to the COB and degree of involvement in the accreditation process. Data revealed the more complex and intricate dynamics of the faculty experience of moving to the "next level" and faculty members' personal reasons for engaging in the accreditation process.

Reframing a Work Life

Becoming a different type of academic was the most prominent change for most faculty members. In some cases, individuals fully reconstructed their faculty role, moving from concentrating only on teaching, to adding in research and writing *and* being published. For some this was a reframing of more than a professional life—the journey to status and legitimacy also required a reframing of personal lives. Some spoke of the loss of time, such as personal time on weekends and holidays that now was used for research and writing.

Hence, motivating faculty to accept a substantially increased workload was a necessary precedent to success as Rowan moved from a teaching-only orientation to an environment in which excellence in research attained equal status with excellence in teaching. The challenges of that cultural shift cannot be minimized. One faculty described the effort as "growing up and growing through it."

While a majority viewed accreditation as a desirable goal, the effort to achieve AACSB legitimacy required what many faculty described as "determination." In fact, COB faculty, across all categories of service and experience, identified individual and group determination as the primary factor for achieving accreditation. Equally noted was the willingness of faculty to work extremely hard, both to sustain effective teaching and to engage in a productive research agenda. A vast majority of faculty members attributed their determination to the tangible institutional support from the president and the dean: monetary resources and re-assigned time to engage research and attend conferences. One faculty described the support as "a kind of bonus" that communicated administration's belief in the program. An accreditation supporter noted, "It made people do their job and do it properly." A colleague triangulated that view and admitted feeling "forced to develop a research agenda which has made me be a better academic." The data also provided insights into the factors that motivated this COB faculty to engage in the work that made them better academics.

Intrinsic Motivating Factors

One finding was very clear from the data: the *need for legitimacy* was a potent force during this institutional culture shift, and the normative culture of AACSB constructed the pathway. Weick and Quinn (1999) note that the "logic of attraction" is a powerful, but less used, leadership principle when transformation is needed (p. 384). Most often, personal motivation was governed

by the potential for increased status and prestige for the individual faculty member, for the COB, and for the institution. When comparing perceptions of why accreditation was pursued and the benefits after it was achieved, the majority of respondents perceived that they had "acquired the blue ribbon of academic excellence," and were now among a "select group" that had achieved status comparable to leading academic institutions. Faculty also believed that higher quality students were now enrolling in their upgraded, accredited programs, and that graduates possessed better credentials because they were graduating from an accredited school. No matter the experience or length of service, faculty regarded this effort as attaining "a hallmark of quality." In fact, respondents identified these intrinsic factors (i.e., enhanced personal and professional prestige for the COB and enhanced professional credibility for them as faculty members employed by an AACSB-accredited institution) as more motivating than the extrinsic factors (i.e., time and resources). When asked to provide advice for other deans, all 27 respondents stressed the importance of creating a clear understanding of the purpose and benefits of achieving AACSB accreditation.

Collectively and individually, the COB faculty gave personal resources in order to have what other AACSB accredited institutions have: prestige and status. Many faculty perceived the University's commitment of resources to the accreditation process as only an indirect reward for attaining accreditation. Rather, having AACSB-accredited business programs was viewed as evidence of being a strong, and more prestigious, academic institution. This conclusion was validated by faculty members' identification of the personal benefits gained from AACSB accreditation: pride, personal satisfaction, status, and credibility. As one faculty member noted, "I speak of my school being accredited, and I raise my shoulders high, and I feel proud because we are in that elite group of schools around the world."

Organizational Motivating Factors

The COB faculty uniformly recognized that their successful accreditation effort required exacting attention to detail and extensive record assembly and maintenance. They described, in writing and in interviews, how their high confidence in the ability of the faculty director of AACSB accreditation to assemble the required documentation bolstered their confidence in the outcome. In fact, the faculty member charged with this complex task was identified equally as often as the dean as a “leader extraordinaire.” In the words of one department chair, the leaders never seemed rushed or hurried. “It never seemed as though there were any emergencies . . . I was never presented with any problems. From my perspective, I don’t think there were any major problems that they couldn’t easily handle. I’m sure they worked hard and had issues, but it wasn’t glaringly obvious.”

Notably, the sense of confidence, reinforced by this accreditation coordinator’s attention to detail and maintenance of required documentation, was also rated as *more motivating and important to success* by the faculty than the availability of resources to support the accreditation effort (e.g., faculty development, research, and travel funds). In some cases, the effectiveness of this one individual was perceived as a key reason a faculty member could concentrate on increasing her/his research output.

Working Relationship Factors

All data included multiple references to teamwork. Faculty actively involved in the AACSB accreditation process (though not those less involved) recognized the importance of teamwork in achieving the accreditation on two different levels: (1) making sure faculty were uniformly prepared for the accreditation site visit and able to respond consistently to inquiries of the visiting accreditation team, and (2) making sure faculty collaborated in research projects so that research success was spread

throughout the COB and across all academic disciplines.

The data included many comments about the dean’s skill in sustaining the team effort throughout the process. In the view of most respondents, because teamwork is such an essential factor, a dean must be able to motivate or enhance skills so faculty can “converge and harmonize.” Many had fond recollections of silly, as well as serious moments (a preparatory game of Jeopardy was mentioned often), and many interviewees provided vivid descriptions of the moment when the dean informed them of the positive recommendation of the visiting AACSB accreditation team. For long-term faculty members, the development of relationships across their college was in keeping with earlier experiences in a smaller institution, and the dean’s efforts motivated them to participate more fully.

Leadership Motivating Factors

Respondents across all experience and involvement categories provided important perspectives about the leadership actions that were vital to the accreditation process. First, most participants in this study credited the successful outcome to having a dean who had first-hand experience in, and deep familiarity with, the accreditation process. As one interviewee stated, the dean was clear about “the practical aspects of what was needed for accreditation as well as understanding the political workings of AACSB as a political unit.” Knowledgeable leadership frequently helped faculty to move from “not knowing what we were doing” to a sense that “we can do it [accreditation] and it can get done in this time period.”

Second, “candor” and “honesty” were identified as key leadership attributes that led to the success of the process. Many faculty members stated that the dean never misled them about the amount of work required to attain accreditation, but also noted, “It was worth the effort.”

Third, as mentioned in the previous section, faculty members believed that a leader’s expertise to build effective teams is vital to the success of a first-time accreditation process. In the words of one participant, the process was akin to “aligning the magnetic field.”

Fourth, and finally, a vast majority of respondents noted the importance of the leader’s political skills, not only for attaining required resources from central administration but also in assembling an accreditation team familiar with similar business schools. In the view of many, the visible institutional support and encouragement from Rowan’s president, the monetary resources and reassigned time to engage research, and the support to attend regional and national conferences bolstered their determination to achieve accreditation.

Confidence-Building Factors

Finally, the COB faculty uniformly identified the importance of creating a sense of confidence that accreditation could be achieved. The most critical tactic in this endeavor was a full-fledged mock accreditation visit, conducted by deans possessing extensive experience in the accreditation process. In almost all cases, the faculty moved from uncertainty, with respect to success, to a strong sense of optimism that accreditation could be achieved, and identified the mock visit as the most critically important transitional factor in that change. A typical response described the pre-visit potential as a “daunting challenge” and the post-visit potential as “very likely.” Equally important, the mock visit identified key issues that had to be successfully resolved in order to achieve accreditation. Those issues were placed on a critical “to do” list, the accomplishment of which reinforced faculty confidence and optimism that the visit would be successful.

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Switching texts? In practice, OM terminology is not well standardized, nor are there always consistent definitions between these texts. For example, definitions for cycle time, throughput time, capacity, capacity utilization and the way forecast error is calculated vary across titles. Similarly, notation varies among texts, which can cause some confusion for students when an instructor is used to one notation convention and a text uses another. This is not to suggest that you not change. Just be aware that these details need to be addressed.

Summary

The five books I have reviewed here are similar in many ways yet different in others. Which of these (or other texts) to choose depends on how well it fits with the course you wish to teach. If your course is the one in your curriculum that exercises quantitative skills, the Heizer & Render and Stevenson texts are probably the most rigorous. If you want the students to practice develop-

ing models, Reid & Sanders is best. If you are teaching operations as an integral part of the other functional areas, Krajewski & Ritzman and Reid & Sanders do the best job of integration. If the course needs to fully embrace services, Davis & Heineke is a strong choice (and it has a strong managerial focus).

Perhaps a more important question is: Does the course you wish to teach fit the needs of students in today's operating environment? How does the Operations Management course fit into the education of your students? What can you assume that they know when they come to your course? Is this the only course where they get to put math models to use? What will be used in following courses (and in life)? Which topics are really critical for all managers to understand at least something about? (Is there any virtue to being able to apply Vogel's Approximation method?) Which topics do we teach because we've always taught them? Which do we teach a particular way because we learned them that way? Once these ques-

tions have been answered, then the text choice may become clearer. Is it time for a new book – or also time for a new course? It's up to you!

Disclosure: I have taught from both the Krajewski & Ritzman and the Stevenson texts and know Lee Krajewski, Larry Ritzman, Mark Davis, Janelle Heineke and Dan Reid. I have contributed to the Krajewski & Ritzman text.

Related Web Link

Spreadsheet comparisons by Professor Larry Meile of texts suitable for an introductory course in Operations Management: <http://www2.bc.edu/~meile/DecisionLineTopicTable.xls> ■

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Summary of Critical Factors

Critical factors in successfully achieving initial AACSB accreditation were: (1) creating a sense of determination and willingness to undertake the work required to attain accreditation by creating a clear understanding of what must be accomplished and emphasizing the intrinsic value of AACSB accreditation; (2) placing the task of documentation and record assembly in the hands of a capable individual with keen attention to detail; (3) developing strong teamwork among the faculty to prepare for the accreditation visit and to support the generation of the required level of successful research; (4) the dean's intimate familiarity with the accreditation process, teamwork building skills, and political skills in gaining necessary resources and assembling a strong accreditation site visitation team;

and (5) enhancing faculty confidence and assurance by conducting a full-fledged mock accreditation visit.

Attaining legitimacy for a College of Business through AACSB accreditation can be daunting, particularly when the effort requires a personal and professional culture shift. The College of Business at Rowan University accomplished more than just reaching *the next level*. This faculty and their leadership have given us a window on what sociologist J Kenneth Benson (1977) called the "process of becoming."

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Feature Editor Krishna S. Dhir invites papers, essays or notes for the Deans' Perspective feature column from administrators and faculty members. It is hoped that this column will become a thriving forum for dialog among our readers on issues pertaining to academic leadership. It offers an opportunity to administrators and faculty members alike to speak their minds on any and all aspects of the various leadership issues confronting them. Please contact Dean Dhir at kdhir@berry.edu, or call him at (706) 238-7942 or (706) 346-5066, or send fax to him at (706) 802-6728. Articles may be of any length up to a maximum of about 2500 words.