

Chapter 11

Global Accreditation for a Knowledge- Oriented Community: Foundational Change breeds Global Access to Educational and Economic Opportunity

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ABSTRACT

Faculty, administrators, businesses, accrediting agencies, and other institutions concerned with higher education quality must act to provide a framework for international higher learning standards, particularly concerning e-learning and access in developing countries. Higher education internationalization efforts will continue through the use of IT, increased mobility, the knowledge economy, and an integrated world economy (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Global accreditation will help to assure quality and increase options to improve access. A global accreditation model would provide the impetus for a knowledge-oriented global community that provides access to students in developing countries, as well as traditional and non-traditional learners. The chapter examines key forces shaping the transformation and globalization of higher education, international entities taking a global approach to quality assurance and accreditation, and key concepts in development and implementation of quality assurance at the global level. Finally, the chapter concludes with future implications in the ongoing development of global accreditation.

INTRODUCTION

Participatory and outcome-centered online learning has the potential to radically alter the future

of higher education assessment. Through global accreditation and peer review, online learning can become an outcome-based mode of knowledge creation and transfer that not only supplements

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campus-based learning, but creates knowledge providers and lifelong student-to-content-provider partnerships that supersede traditional university social contracts. Accordingly, accreditation is a systematic self-study by the institution or program under examination; involved is an external, peer-reviewed process that leads to a written report used to grant accreditation, renew accreditation, or provide sanctions against an already accredited institution (Materu, 2007). In this chapter, I argue that inclusion of the business community and a focus on outcome-based assessment can offer the radical change which is needed in the higher education community.

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are growing in size and scope (Naidoo, 2001), including almost 3.5 million students who took at least one online course in the fall of 2006 (Allen & Seaman, 2008), yet not as quickly in accountability and accreditation (Onsman, 2010). Accordingly, increased student competition for higher education on an international level “is making it difficult for governments to meet demand” (Knight, 2005, p. 8). Aligned with this growth is the reality that lifelong earnings of individual agents are systematically related to level of cognitive skills (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008). A global accreditation model would provide the impetus for a knowledge-oriented global community that provides access to students in developing countries, as well as traditional and non-traditional learners. In viewing higher education as both a public and private good, governmental support, combined with business community input on outcomes, has the potential to shift higher learning from an elite element of society to the economic and educational necessity that it is today. In short, I argue that accreditation and peer review, focused on outcome-based assessment, will be the foundation that transforms our traditional view of colleges and universities to one of global access.

BACKGROUND

Human Capital

An increasing prevalence of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has led to greater access to postsecondary learning practices, including “changes to learning contexts, expectations and practices” (Ellis & Goodyear, 2010, p. 21). Yet, what does this mean outside of modern advanced societies? Becker (1993) defines human capital as schooling, training, expenditures on medical care, and similar efforts that improve health, raise earnings, or add to a person’s appreciation of literature over much of his or her lifetime. In this sense, we, as labor, supply our skill set to employers who, in return, exchange compensation for our services. In essence, we invest in ourselves in order to increase our employability within a knowledge-oriented community. Yet, in many parts of the world, the demand for labor is one-sided. Malan (2005) notes the similarities between multinational corporations and South African corporations—a country with five percent of Africa’s population, but a contribution of 30 percent of the continent’s GDP (p. 49). These organizations have direct access to political leaders, and thus are able to heavily influence regions across Africa (Malan, 2005). This means that expanding South African corporations, like their multinational counterparts, are setting the pace in host countries concerning what university graduates should know, and thus serving as outcomes assessment evaluators. The influence of large corporations expanding into developing regions determines partially what colleges and universities focus their learning standards upon; but some host countries, including those in differing parts of Africa, offer resistance because of the aggressive management styles of multinationals and their detrimental effects on small business, including putting “local enterprises out of business” (Malan, 2005, p. 50).

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