Employer Engagement

Programmatic Accreditation Practices

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Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors
Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)

This report summarizes the results of a survey to ASPA member accreditors on their practices related to the involvement of employers in the accreditation process.

ASPA Member Accreditors
- AACSB International
- ABET
- Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
- Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing
- Accreditation Commission for Homeopathic Education in North America
- Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education
- Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics
- Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling
- Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education
- Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education
- Accreditation Council on Optometric Education
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant
- Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools
- American Board for Accreditation in Psychoanalysis
- American Board of Funeral Service Education
- American Council for Construction Education
- American Library Association - Committee on Accreditation
- American Polygraph Association
- American Society of Health-System Pharmacists
- American Veterinary Medicine Association - Council on Education
- Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools
- Association of Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering
- Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education
- Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education
- Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care
- Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education
- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education
- Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education
- Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- Commission on Dental Accreditation
- Commission on English Language Program Accreditation
- Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation
- Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation
- Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
- Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology
- Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs
- Council on Chiropractic Education
- Council on Education for Public Health
- Council on Naturopathic Medical Education
- Council on Social Work Education
- Council on Podiatric Medical Education
- Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission
- Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine Technology
- Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board
- Liaison Committee on Medical Education
- Master’s in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council
- Midwifery Education Accreditation Council
- Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education
- National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences
- National Architectural Accrediting Board
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- National Association of Schools of Dance
- National Association of Schools of Theatre
- National Association of Schools of Art and Design
- National Association of Schools of Music
- National Nurse Practitioner Residency and Fellowship Training Consortium
- Planning Accreditation Board
- Project Management Institute Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs

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Specialized and professional accreditors set national accreditation standards and determine necessary competencies for safe and effective practice. Contributions of experts in each profession, including practitioners, employers and industry, educators, professional associations, and other communities of interest are critical to ensure that practice skills meet the needs of today’s workforce.

Recent discussions about skills gaps, where graduates of higher education programs are thought not to have the competencies that employers need or want, suggest a disconnect between the education system and industry.

To test the veracity of this perception and to determine the level of engagement with employers that occurs related to programmatic accreditation, the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) posed questions to its 62 members – how does the accreditor interact directly with employers, and what requirements does the accreditor have for programs regarding employer engagement?

Findings indicated that the overwhelming majority of ASPA member accreditors have mechanisms for direct interaction with employers and require accredited programs to have systems in place to engage with employers.

Accreditor direct involvement with employers was identified by 90% of ASPA members to include: employer advisory councils, employer participation in review and development of accreditation standards, employer participation on site visit teams, employer participation on decision-making bodies, employer/industry surveys, and the use of job practice analyses to inform accreditation standards. Most accreditors use more than one of these methods to ensure that employers have input in the determination of competencies that students will need to enter practice upon program completion.

Requirements for accredited program involvement with employers were identified by 90% of ASPA members to include: community and employer involvement in curriculum design, employer satisfaction with program completers, employer/industry/practice advisory boards, and experiential/practical/clinical placements for students.

Overall, 100% of ASPA member accreditors of programs whose mission is linked to employment either directly engage with employers, or require programs to seek employer input. Students can be assured that specialized and professional accreditors, and the higher education programs they accredit, are working with employers so that students are prepared with the necessary competencies for safe and effective practice in their chosen profession or field of study.
Introduction

Specialized\(^1\) and professional accreditors set national accreditation standards and determine necessary competencies through an inclusive process involving expert stakeholders in the profession. Practitioners, employers and industry, educators, professional associations, and other communities of interest all contribute in this endeavor. Programmatic accreditors focus on educational standards that protect the public interest by producing safe and competent practitioners in the students’ chosen professions or fields of study.

Current discussions about job skills gaps, wherein students completing higher education programs are perceived to not be equipped with the competencies\(^2\) that employers need, imply a disconnect between the education system and industry. This report provides an analysis of the state of current employer engagement practices of specialized and professional accreditors.

During the latter months of 2017, the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) surveyed its 62 members to determine how employers are involved in the accreditation process: how the accreditor interacts directly with employers and what requirements the accreditor has for programs regarding employer engagement.

Findings Overview

Ninety percent (90%) of ASPA members directly engage with employers via methods including:

- employer/industry/practice advisory board/council,
- employer participation in review and development of accreditation standards,
- employer participation on site visit teams,
- employer participation on decision-making bodies,
- job practice analyses inform accreditation standards, and
- employer/industry surveys.

Ninety percent (90%) of ASPA members require programs to engage with employers. Methods include:

- community and employer involvement in design of curriculum and/or other aspects of the program,
- employer satisfaction with program completers,
- employer/industry/practice advisory board/council, and
- experiential/practical/clinical placements for students.

Overall, 100% of ASPA member accreditors of programs whose mission is linked to employment have mechanisms in place for employer engagement.

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\(^1\) The terms “specialized”, “professional” and “programmatic” are used synonymously in this report.

\(^2\) Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities/attitudes necessary for safe and effective practice. These include profession-specific competencies, as well as critical thinking skills and the ability to grow, to adapt, and to create knowledge that is essential for the evolution of professional practice in response to a changing environment.
Accreditor Involvement with Employers

Figure 1 provides the percentage of the various methods by which accreditors engage with employers. Most accreditors employ more than one method.

For the category “other”, ASPA members provided commentary on various methods that incorporate the employer perspective of the nature of practice and employment in the field to inform the accreditation process and establish competencies. Several indicated that practitioners who serve on evaluation and decision-making bodies are often senior level and fit the “employer” category, as would practitioners in fields where most are self-employed. As well, it was noted that employers participate in the self-study report preparation and are interviewed during the site visit.

For the category “none”, two of six accreditors indicated that the missions of the accredited programs were not linked to employment. Of the remaining four accreditors, all require programs to obtain employer input.

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3 An example of programs whose missions are not linked to employment: English language programs provided to non-immigrant international students to improve proficiency for English-medium university studies, personal, or professional goals – not for employment in the USA or to prepare them for a profession, licensure, or work placement.
Requirements for Program Engagement with Employers

Figure 2 provides the percentage of the various requirements that accredited programs must meet regarding engagement with employers. The majority of accreditors impose more than a single requirement for accredited programs in this regard.

For the category “other”, several accreditors noted that while employer satisfaction measures and advisory boards are not required, programs are encouraged to use these methods, and most do. All programs must engage with employers in a way that informs curriculum and provides validity to their student learning competencies. Employer feedback is obtained by including practitioners in all aspects of the accreditation review process.

Of the six accreditors who indicated “none” in this category, four have mechanisms in place to directly engage with employers and two are accreditors of programs whose missions are not linked with employment.

Conclusion

Specialized and professional accreditors set standards for higher education programs that ensure graduates know and are able to perform the essential functions to safely and effectively practice in their chosen profession. A key strength of the programmatic accreditation enterprise is the involvement of all stakeholders in the profession. Employers specifically provide input regarding competencies they need so that graduates are successful once employed. Stakeholders can be assured that specialized and professional accreditors are engaging with employers both directly and through program requirements so that educational programming is relevant to the needs of the professions, industry and the public.