

ASPA News - January 2001

Issue Theme: "Adding Value Through Good Planning"

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Remarks from the Chair

By David J. Werner, chair, ASPA Board of Directors; Chancellor, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Spring is coming! That may be hard to believe with much of the country gripped by bone chilling cold air and blanketed by deep snow, but March and the spring ASPA meeting are just around the corner. ASPA has many functions, but none is more important than providing opportunities for accreditors to get together and learn from each other. So, mark your calendar now, and plan to be in Washington with your colleagues.

I'm pleased to tell you that ASPA is in good health. Membership remains strong, and we have inquiries from potential new members. More importantly, ASPA continues to grow in stature as a responsible voice for specialized accreditation.

The spring meeting offers an important opportunity for ASPA to continue its work on the statement approved by NASULGC and AAU regarding specialized accreditation standards. Their statement was transmitted to CHEA. After consulting with the AAU/NASULGC task force and its specialized advisory panel, CHEA drafted a statement that may be ready for review and analysis in March. The outcome of this process is extraordinarily important to specialized accreditation. The Board needs the advice of all ASPA members regarding how to proceed.

See you in March. If you can arrive a day early, you might want to visit the new pandas at the Washington zoo!

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Mark Your Calendars

The Spring 2001 ASPA meeting, to be held Sunday - Tuesday, March 25-27 at The Ritz-Carlton, Pentagon City, Arlington, VA, will focus on "Effective Planning." To book a room at the group rate of \$169/night plus tax, call 703/ 415-5000 prior to the room release date of February 28, 2001. To ensure a full set of materials, send your meeting registrations to the ASPA office by February 27, 2001. Members who register prior to February 22 are eligible for a \$50 early bird discount.

In addition to the March 26 election of board and committee members, the Spring meeting agenda includes timely issues and sessions that take advantage of the Washington DC location. After the New Orleans meeting, members requested more interaction with regional accreditors. Sandra Elman, executive director, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, has accepted our invitation to speak at lunch on Monday. The Tuesday professional development session, "Planning How to Do What We (Accreditors) Do Better," will include outside experts and peers. Meeting schedules and registration forms are enclosed with this mailing. Contact the ASPA office if you have questions.

Save the Date - ASPA's Fall 2001 meeting will be held Sunday - Tuesday, September 9-11 at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain, Paradise Valley, AZ (between Scottsdale and Phoenix). The renovated hotel and meeting room space will re-open in early spring. The spa and tennis areas won't be completed until fall.

The ASPA block includes rooms at the pre-opening rates of \$140/night (deluxe) and \$175/night (one-bedroom casita suites). If the hotel has rooms available, these rates will apply before and after the meeting dates. Information about this exciting property is available at: www.sanctuaryoncamelback.com.

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ASPA's Strategic Plan

By Betty J. Horton, COA-NA: Nurse Anesthesia, ASPA Vice-chair

Two significant events have influenced the services provided by the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) since its incorporation in 1993. The first event was hiring a full time Executive Director, Cynthia Davenport, in 1995 to manage ASPA's affairs. The second event was the adoption of a detailed strategic plan in 1996 to guide the development of the organization's administrative, fiscal, and membership services.

Although the original strategic plan was simplified in 1998, it has continued to focus on three basic goals for ASPA: (1) To participate effectively in the higher education and accreditation communities; (2) To serve members current needs; (3) To maintain an effective and efficient organization. Each of these broad goals is supported by specific objectives that are selected and implemented annually. At the end of each year, an assessment is made to determine how well the

organization has met its objectives in relation to the strategic plan. Objectives for the following year are also prioritized at this time based on the three goals of the strategic plan and input from ASPA’s members.

Advocating for specialized accreditation within the government and higher education communities, expanding professional development offerings, and building an organizational structure to function in the future environment are actions that have been taken to fulfill ASPA’s strategic plan. As an example, at each meeting the Board of Directors sponsors a session now called “Strategies for Improving Accreditation.” Session topics have been geared toward expanding the knowledge of professional accreditors about current issues in the field, in addition to stimulating conversation about their significance to specialized accreditation.

The following topics have been presented at Strategies for Improving Accreditation sessions from 1995 through 2000:*

1995	Systematic review of standards for validity, reliability and relevancy
1996	The development of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and its impact on accreditation.
1996	Saving time for those being accredited through effective partnerships.
1996	Debate - Every eligible accrediting body should seek recognition from CHEA
1996	Integration of technology into higher education
1997	Conducting accreditation reviews to produce positive attitudes in Presidents and Provosts: How to make a big difference with minimal resources
1997	Accreditation history
1997	Proposed model of grouped accreditation site visits (SACS)
1998	Developing common data elements for data collection by regional and specialized accreditation agencies
1999	The Devil made me do it - Faculty use of accreditation for self gain
1999	Walking the line between confidentiality and disclosure
1999	Good practice in communication with Presidents and Provosts
1999	Let’s look at the self study
1999	So tell me what you [institutional representatives] really think
1999	Re-thinking why we do what we do with self studies
2000	Does the use of public and practitioner members contribute to quality?
2000	Differences between initial accreditation and re-accreditation

Importantly, the Strategies for Improving Accreditation Board of Directors’ sessions are only one way that ASPA demonstrates its commitment to professional development. Two Professional

Development Committees make significant contributions to achieving this objective through well planned workshops, presentations, etc. that are held at every ASPA meeting. It is gratifying to note that evaluations and anecdotal comments from these events indicate that they are meeting a basic goal of the strategic plan by serving the members' current needs for professional development. We encourage you to submit suggestions for future topics to the ASPA office.

* Thank you to C. Davenport for providing the list of topics.

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August 2000: "Cooperating for Quality" in New Orleans

More than 100 specialized and regional accreditors and other guests meet together in late August 2000 at the Hotel Monteleone, New Orleans. Although ASPA meets twice a year, the regional accreditors hold an "all-staff" retreat just once every two years. In order to meet the needs of both groups, the two planning committees supplemented the combined sessions that opened the meeting with separate programming.

On Sunday afternoon, John Dwyer, SACS: Southern Association, and Pat Evans, CEPH: Public Health, co-presented "Accreditation 101" for their new accreditation colleagues, while others attended the "Accreditation Showcase" and heard presentations by Jennifer Butlin, CCNE: Nursing, Nancy Randolph, CSWE: Social Work, and Jack Allen, SACS: Southern Association.

Joint programming continued on Monday morning, with welcomes by David B. Wolf, Western AACJC and chair of C-RAC: Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, and ASPA's chair, David J. Werner, chancellor, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Jean Avent Morse, MSA: Middle States, and Carol Bobby, CACREP: Counseling, spoke about shared values held by accreditors. You will find Carol Bobby's speech, "Tough Customers" in this issue of ASPA News.

Two rounds of break-out sessions allowed those attending the meeting to select topics of primary interest to them. Many topics were co-presented by specialized and regional representatives, allowing similarities and differences to be highlighted. Topics for both sessions were grouped into the following four tracks: Cooperative Efforts, Student Learning Outcomes, Streamlining Accreditation, and Compliance Issues.

Monday afternoon was divided between the ASPA business meeting and programming devoted to Strategies for Improving Accreditation. Milton Blood, AACSB: Business/Management Education, facilitated a session called "Don't Play It Again, Sam: Differences Between Initial Accreditation and Re-accreditation." Tuesday's professional development session on "Good Practice in the Use of Annual or Interim Reports" included a summary of survey results and round-table discussion.

The Regional and ASPA Planning Committees built an element of fun into the meeting. A Share Fair, held as part of the Sunday reception, encouraged folks to learn more about their colleagues

as they socialized. The fun continued on Monday evening during a river boat cruise. Assorted trinkets and prizes enhanced the New Orleans dinner menu and jazz.

ASPA received many positive comments about this combined meeting. In response, your ASPA leaders have made a commitment to seek out more opportunities to interact with our regional accreditor colleagues.

A special “thank you” from ASPA goes to those who planned this meeting:

Betty Horton, CoA - NA: Nurse Anesthesia
ASPA planning committee chair

Susan Abbe, NLNAC: Nursing

along with members of the ASPA Fall Professional Development Sub-Committee:

Mary Jane Harris, CAPTE: Physical Therapy
committee co-chair

Doris Gordon, ACOTE: Occupational Therapy

Don Kaveny, COAMFTE: Marriage and Family Therapy

Cynthia Davenport, Executive Director, ASPA

ASPA also extends special appreciation to:

Susan Van Kollenburg, NCA: North Central
chair of the regional accreditors’ planning committee

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Did you Know...???

by Cynthia Davenport, Executive Director, ASPA

Did you know that 36% of US institutions have no programs accredited by specialized accreditors and another 20% have only one such program? Here’s the current numbers of specialized accreditations from the 2001 *Higher Education Directory*.

Of the 4,083 institutions listed, 1,478 (36.2%) have only one accreditation, either regional or national institutional. Another 842 institutions (20.6%) have just two accreditations, one institutional and one specialized, 451 have three (11%), 277 have four (6.8%), 219 have five (5.4%) and 154 have six (3.8%). While 84% of the institutions have five or fewer specialized accreditations, only 8% (324) of the listed institutions have ten or more specialized accreditations.

Comparing these numbers to 1972 data cited by Orlans (p.23) shows the following changes. The number of institutions has increased by 56%, from 2,617 to 4,083. In 1972, the number of institutions with just one accreditation (regional or national) was 1,236 or 47%, while 763 (29.1%) had one institutional and one specialized accreditation. 94% of the institutions in 1972 had five or fewer specialized accreditations, while 3.3% (87) of them had between five and ten and only 1.7% (68) had more than ten.

ASPA thanks the HED for help with this analysis.

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Tough Customers

The following paper was presented by Carol L. Bobby in New Orleans on August 28, 2000 during the accreditation retreat of the regional and specialized accreditors. Carol Bobby is Executive Director of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and Immediate Past Chair of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors. (ASPA).

Good morning. I want to express my appreciation to those of you who entrusted me to speak at this plenary session. I will tell you up front that when I was told that the topic was “values held by accreditors,” I wondered if I would be able to find anything of interest to say to you. It feels sort of like preaching to the choir. But, nevertheless, as I began to think about the topic, I realized that it was indeed a perfect topic to set the tone for the next day and a half. It is an opportunity to examine who we are, what we are doing, and how we can improve and learn from one another. So let me start with a story- one that is true and one that will literally ring some bells.

Years ago, in another life, I was an assistant buyer working in the bed, bath, lamps and other assorted home accessories division in a major department store. Much to my displeasure, each year it was my division’s responsibility to go to the warehouse, unpack all the sample Christmas trees, bring them to the store and then decorate them with the newest ornaments. I hated it. Being in charge of the Christmas shop was no fun. As you can imagine, the amount of daily traffic in this shop was extraordinary and there were fingers on every piece of merchandise. Excited kids would race through on their way to see Santa and push every musical toy they could find. Jingle Bells, White Christmas, and Silent Night would play simultaneously and drive me nuts. But the worst sound of all was the shattering of another expensive hand-blown bulb. I cringed every time I heard this sound, because I knew that the cost of that bulb would come out of my division’s profit. You see, the motto of the department store where I worked was “The customer is always right.” That motto translated into the customer could not be held responsible for the broken bulb. It must have been clumsily hung on the tree to fall so easily. But even worse for me was the day that a customer returned a set of those annoying musical bells. Although she had no receipt, and although the bells were rusty and old from years of use, she claimed she had bought them the week before and that now they were broken. I bit my tongue, rang up the return, and refunded her the cost of a new set of bells, because as I said before “the customer is always right.”

Clearly, here was a company that valued its customers. When the customer spoke, we all listened. As far as I can tell, customers are still valued in many American businesses. Go into any Starbucks and listen to the orders being relayed... "I'd like an iced grande café mocha, half regular and half decaf, light on the ice with a dollop of lowfat whipping cream, please." And amazingly the customer gets what they ask for... or you might say they are getting what they deserve. After all, they are paying over \$3.00 for that cup of coffee.

Well, I have heard a lot of rhetoric over the past few years arguing that higher education needs to adopt a more business-like attitude for the delivery of education. That higher education needs to realize that students are customers buying services. That competition from entrepreneurial educational enterprises such as Internet based learning is forcing change in the traditional delivery of education. That educational systems should be designed and executed using quality management and continuous improvement strategies. That institutions need to justify the cost of the education with the value for the customer.

The bottom line of all this is that there are some tough customers out there and their voices are demanding our attention. Listen for a moment about what I have heard our customers say over the years about the product or service that we as accreditors provide.

Accreditation is ... Duplicative; Punitive; Costly; Burdensome; Irrelevant; Inefficient; Restrictive; Secretive; Inflexible; Inhibiting; Rigid; Stagnant; Tedious; Worthless; Prescriptive; Slow-moving; Self-serving; Nothing more than bean counting.

I have even heard specialized accreditation accused of being the balkanization of American higher education. Of course, that accusation was hurled at us back in the days when COPA, known as the balance wheel of accreditation, got a flat tire.

But have we paid attention? I believe that we have and I believe that we have tried to do so in a responsible manner. It has not been easy and we do not always get credit for the changes we have implemented. Let me provide some examples.

How many of you in the room have heard one or more horror stories about business accreditation? How many of you have heard criticism of teacher education accreditation? Or, let's see, a few weeks ago in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, one institution said of its regional accreditor, "We produced this two-inch thick document, and I don't even have it on my shelf, because it's not worth having."

Such comments would lead you to believe that there have been no changes in our accrediting processes for the past 20 years. They would also lead you to believe that we didn't care about our customers. But such comments are simply not true from my experience with accreditation over the past 15 years. Ever since I was hired as the director of a specialized accrediting agency, I feel that I have been trying to keep my head above water in a turbulent sea of change. Business accreditation introduced its mission-based accreditation review process. NCATE moved from programmatic to unit accreditation and has now just recently published its new competency-based criteria. Journalism opened every aspect of its process, including its decision-

making sessions, to the public. Engineering moved forward with mutual recognition through the signing of the Washington Accord. And as for the Regionals, I marveled at the creation of IRAC to deal with Western Governors University. Likewise I have been impressed with the unveiling of North Central's AQIP and Western Seniors willingness to experiment with custom-tailored reviews. All of us have attempted to help programs and schools use outcomes assessment data as planning tools for the future. The fact of the matter is that these have been exciting years and a lot of change has occurred in the product and service we provide. It is clear to me that accreditors have listened to the criticisms of their toughest customers and that we have placed value in measured change.

Measured change - let me spend a few moments discussing why I decided to include this as the first in my list of important values in accreditation.

Accreditation has usually been described as a uniquely American process. In the higher education arena, it has played an important role in higher education's ability remain self-regulating without government control and intervention. It has done this by being viewed as a function of accountability; that is, as a measure of quality assurance for the public that a standard of acceptability has been achieved. I believe that it is the value we have placed on the accountability or quality assurance function that causes us as accreditors to be wary of changing too quickly or too radically. Whatever changes we make, we must measure them against both the public's and our understanding of what constitutes quality. We must be able to justify that we have not thrown the baby out with the bath water. With this in mind, listen to a few more customer comments.

Beth McMurtrie wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* last month that critics of some of the changes being proposed by the Regionals are concerned "that removing traditional measures of quality [will] open the door for questionable institutions to gain accreditation and dysfunctional ones to keep it." Jane Wellman was quoted in this same article as saying, "I don't know how they're [the Regionals] going to tell the difference between the good, the bad, and the ugly."

We really do have some tough customers to please, don't we? But, as an accreditor, I am fully aware that much thought and work has gone into these proposed changes. The decision to make changes has not been made in isolation. If your commissions are anything like the board I work with, I am certain that there have been lively debates, a lot of public input, some pilot projects to determine the problems and solutions, and at least one person with enough guts to say, "let's at least try this." Speaking of public input, my organization just recently completed a standards revision process and we had three rounds of public drafts that were widely disseminated among our constituents. The drafts were published on the web, sent to institutions, sent to our team members, sent to all the elected leaders in counseling organizations... well, you get the picture. We really tried hard to make this an open and public review process.

Which brings me to a second value that I believe is held by accreditors. That value is the emphasis we place on opening our processes to external scrutiny. Most of us in this room not only undergo standards revision reviews where we seek comment from our constituencies- that

is, the faculty, administrators, practitioners, students and other consumers of our services - but we also openly place our standards and processes in the public eye when we undergo review for recognition by CHEA and/or the US Department of Education. These processes are time-consuming, costly, oftentimes challenging, and can effectively keep us from making radical changes without appropriate consultation with our customers. At the same time, these processes can also provide us with valuable feedback on ways we might do things differently. I know my agency has changed as a result of these public reviews. Our standards have become less prescriptive, the number of public members on our board has increased, common practice has been written into published policy, we publicize our willingness to conduct collaborative visits with other accrediting agencies, and we require our programs to conduct and use program evaluation data for review and planning purposes. My guess is that bells are ringing for some of you who have also made some of these changes in light of public reviews.

The third value and final value that I want to mention this morning is the importance we place on the volunteer peer review process. We are, for the most part, organizations run by small staffs that rely on huge numbers of volunteers. Our boards and commissions are composed of volunteers. Our visiting teams are composed of trained volunteers. These volunteers are the very individuals that teach in our accredited institutions and programs. These volunteers are the very persons that make decisions about institutional governance. These volunteers are the same people that rely on our decisions when deciding which program or school their sons and daughters should attend. Let me make very clear what I am saying here, because I think this is important. Our volunteers are the accreditors. More importantly, I am saying that our volunteers are also our customers. They are the public, the faculty, the administrators and the students in our programs and institutions. They are the consumers of our services. In other words, they are we and we, the accreditors, are they. I think it is worth reminding ourselves about this when the criticisms flare so brightly that we are blinded from seeing the worth of what we accomplish. I think we need to remember that “we” have changed as “they” are ready.

So now that our customers are ready for some more changes, we are ready, too. Let’s tackle the issues one-by-one. Let’s continue to examine the ways that we can collaborate and reduce duplication. Let’s determine whether times are calling for us to be more open in the kinds of information we share. Let’s create review processes that are so value-adding that cost becomes a non-issue. Let’s continue to review the intersection between student outcomes and resources to determine where the balance lies in determining what constitutes quality. We have already begun moving in this direction and we have done so thoughtfully and with an eye toward public accountability. I believe the value of measured change will continue to serve us well in the quality assurance arena.

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