

# Employing Accreditation to Strengthen Planning and Drive Improvement

Edited by Lynn Priddy, PhD



The Society for College  
and University Planning

Excerpt

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# CONTENTS

## Introduction ..... [iii](#)

*Lynn Priddy, PhD*

## Introduction to Accreditation ..... [1](#)

*by Belle S. Wheelan, PhD*

## Connecting the Dots ..... [3](#)

Accountability, Assessment, Analytics, and Accreditation

*by Linda L. Baer, PhD*

## Reflections on Two Decades of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Developing Economies ..... [21](#)

*by Fred M. Hayward, PhD*

## Using Big Data ..... [35](#)

How Moneyball and an Ardent Baseball Fan Shaped Successful Metrics-Based University Planning

*by Roy Mathew, PhD, Elsa Bonilla-Martin, PhD, Daniel Santana, and Erick Gonzalez*

## The Value of Higher Education Maker Spaces for Accreditation and Beyond. ..... [43](#)

*by Vincent Wilczynski, PhD, Aubrey Wigner, PhD, Micah Lande, PhD, and Shawn Jordan, PhD*

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# INTRODUCTION

Accreditation, both programmatic and institutional, holds far more potential for an organization's strategic and academic planning than most colleges and universities realize. Quite often, a president or provost assigns accreditation to an institutional department that focuses narrowly on managing the accrediting relationship, making sure the institution is in compliance, and dealing with data updates, documents, and visits. However, accreditation can be a powerful force aligned with integrated planning efforts. In fact, accreditation as quality assurance provides university, advisory, and other boards, the public, and external agencies an automatic third-party affirmed metric on overall institutional soundness, capacity for change and innovation, attention to the educational enterprise, and direct and indirect measures of standing KPIs.

Whereas many institutions struggle to define, align, and aggregate metrics and targets from academics, resources, student success, and operations into strategic KPIs, accreditors already provide a framework for doing so. Through criteria and standards, programmatic and institutional accreditors lay out increasingly comprehensive rubrics requiring data, analytics, and their analysis and use. Simply having data is not sufficient. Rather, institutions must demonstrate quality and capacity, particularly in terms of governance, resources and sustainability, instructional and educational effectiveness, student learning and completion, and strategic advancement or innovation. As such, accreditation that is integrated with multi-level institutional planning provides a ready-made, third-party accountability and improvement scaffold that colleges can choose to integrate into their own operational and strategic planning priorities, goals, metrics, and target results. By embracing accreditation as a driver of institutional quality and strategy versus compliance, colleges and universities reinforce a more purposeful role for accreditation itself. The integration ensures better accountability to institutional members, more relevant criteria and standards, and a stronger focus on the missions and priorities of colleges and universities. As the federal government continues to rethink, revise, and refine regulations for accreditation, preserving it as integral to effective strategic planning becomes ever more imperative.

The articles selected for this collection include both a retrospective and an introduction to the field for readers new to the topic. The remaining articles showcase how institutions intentionally employ accreditation at multiple levels to strengthen integrated planning and propel ongoing quality improvement.

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