
Mission Orientations and Deans' Perceptions: Implications for the New AACSB Accreditation Standards

Mission
Orientations and
Perceptions

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Background

In 1988 the Board of Directors of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) agreed to sponsor a comprehensive review of its ongoing accreditation standards and in January of the following year The Accreditation Project Task Force was constituted.

This review and the subsequent proposal that was brought before the membership of the AACSB at the Spring 1991 meeting, was prompted by the desire of the AACSB to remain responsive and adaptive to the needs of (present and potential) member schools. An earlier AACSB sponsored study (Porter and McKibbin, 1988) had identified a number of areas of concern to higher education in business, including the relative role of the AACSB as an accrediting body. In keeping with concerns such as these, as well as the need to enhance the value of the AACSB, the task force commenced its work in the Spring of 1989.

After two years of review and analysis the task force, with the unanimous recommendation of the AACSB Board of Directors, presented its proposed accreditation standards to the membership of the AACSB at the annual meeting in April of 1991. At this meeting the newly proposed standards were adopted by the AACSB member schools with the intention of being fully phased into the accreditation process by 1994.

One of the early objectives of the task force was to create an accreditation process anchored to a statement of mission, which would be developed by the individual school or college sitting for accreditation review. This mission statement not only needed to be appropriate to the pursuit of higher education in business and management, but additionally, needed to be an accurate and realistic reflection of the larger institution's relative position and role in higher education. To quote the standards which were adopted in 1991: "Generally, schools with greater emphasis on graduate instruction relative to undergraduate instruction should

Journal of Organizational Change
Management, Vol. 6 No. 1, 1993,
pp. 17-27. © MCB University Press,
0953-4814

place greater emphasis on intellectual contribution". (Final Report of the AACSB Accreditation Project, 1991, p. 31.) In keeping with this objective, the individual school's/college's mission statement needed to reflect the relative emphasis the programme placed on teaching, intellectual contributions, and service. Each programme under AACSB review would be judged within the context of its individualized mission statement.

This change in the accreditation standards of the AACSB signalled a significant shift in the position of the accrediting body. Historically, all member schools had been held accountable to a common set of standards, and initial accreditation or continuing accreditation was based on satisfying a minimum threshold of performance. While visitation teams took into consideration individualized programme objectives and needs as a component of their recommendations, institutional mission was never considered on a more formalized basis in the accreditation process. The 1991 AACSB standards incorporated the clear expectation that schools and colleges of business across the nation differed with regard to resources and objectives and these differences would need to be incorporated, and sanctioned, within the accreditation process.

Homogeneity and the Accredited Business School

During the early history of collegiate level business education in the US, programme diversity seemed to be the norm (McKenna, 1989). In the mid-1950s, the concern regarding what was being carried out under the title of "collegiate business education" in this country became such an important issue that both the Ford and Carnegie Foundations sponsored comprehensive reports on the matter. The Ford Foundation commissioned Professors Robert Gordon and James Howell and simultaneously the Carnegie Foundation charged Professor Frank Pierson with a similar responsibility. Published under the titles *Higher Education in Business* (Gordon and Howell, 1959) and *The Education of American Businessmen* (Pierson, 1959) these two foundation reports assessed the current state of business education, and established its future direction for coming decades.

Both of these comprehensive reports were consistent with regard to the problems which they viewed as being of both general and specific concern to schools of business and were equally congruent in terms of their recommendations. On balance, these authors were sharply critical of the range of faculty preparation, curricula, and teaching pedagogy which they found in business schools of the time and their recommendations were equally specific. Schools of business needed to enhance and upgrade their relative positioning within the university and collegiate educational setting of the time. This needed to be done through recruiting quality faculty, with training at the PhD level, placing an emphasis on the creation of business related knowledge, eliminating the teaching of secondary school business subjects, and developing an integrated college-level business curriculum.

There is little question that the recommendations of the two foundation reports were taken extremely seriously by both the business schools of the time as well as the primary accrediting body, the AACSB (McKenna *et al.*, 1991). For the next 25 years the model of higher education in business proposed by the Gordon and

Howell and Pierson reports served to guide and constrain the development of the field. The AACSB adopted the foundation reports' model and allowed it to serve as the primary guidelines for both initial and continuing accreditation.

In 1988, the publication of the Porter and McKibbin report only served to underscore the notion that not only had the previous 25 years been an attempt to build higher education in business around the recommendations of the earlier foundation reports, but additionally, that this effort was highly successful. For the accredited business school, as well as the programme attempting to achieve accreditation, the message for 25 years was clear and consistent, the standards of the AACSB must serve as both strategic and tactical guidelines for programme development.

Research Focus

Professors Porter and McKibbin acknowledged clearly a distinction between business schools in their study through the classification process they developed (Porter and McKibbin, 1988). In their study "Category One" schools were AACSB accredited doctoral granting institutions, with primarily full-time masters students and a self-rating which placed them in the top quartile of the nation's business/management schools. The next group, "Category Two" schools, were the balance of the AACSB accredited institutions which place less emphasis on faculty research. Finally, "Category Three" schools were not AACSB accredited and were largely undergraduate institutions with little emphasis on research.

To some degree, the classification structure developed by Porter and McKibbin may have been instrumental in the decision of the AACSB to allow member schools to be evaluated within the framework of their self-generated mission statement. In other words, the business school of a small, liberal arts college, that places primary emphasis on quality undergraduate education would have a quite different mission statement from the business school at a research-focused state university. The difference between these two programmes in business would be reflected in such matters as faculty and student recruiting, reward systems, advancement criteria, and relations with the business community.

Cheit (1985) observed this differentiation with regard to the "professional" versus "academic" orientation of business schools. According to Cheit, one of the implications of the 1959 foundation reports was to draw the emphasis in higher education in business away from the professional or vocational focus and more towards the academic or scholarly. Nevertheless, Cheit also notes that in some instances, even today, business schools continue to debate the virtues of teaching business skills as opposed to advanced research in the business arena.

Through their control of the AACSB, deans of accredited institutions make the policy which directs the course of higher education in business for all member schools, including those associate member schools which aspire to eventual accreditation. The intention is that these deans will best serve the AACSB by reflecting the diverse interests of their constituent schools and colleges of business. However, to the extent that the interests of these member institutions are really

quite similar, we might assume that homogeneity rather than differentiation will characterize the accreditation standards and process.

It was with the issue of homogeneity and differentiation that this research was concerned. As has already been mentioned, the 1991 AACSB Standards for Business and Accounting Accreditation, are based clearly on a given institution's presumed ability to develop and operationalize a mission statement which reflects the unique character of the college or school. Keeping this mandate in mind, we also infer an assumption that deans of member institutions are sensitive to and reflect the unique character, circumstances, and products of their particular schools or colleges of business.

Alternatively, the forces which have shaped collegiate business education in this country for the past 25 years may also have served to homogenize the attitudes of deans of accredited institutions. To continue with this logic, should the attitudes and interests of these deans prove to be quite similar with regard to the critical issues which face collegiate business education, it might be rather difficult for truly unique and representative mission statements to be developed. Therefore, it was the expressed purpose of this study to determine if the attitude of deans at different types of schools, varied systematically, across a set of a priori defined mission categories.

It should be noted that this particular study was based on data which were collected prior to the publication of the new AACSB standards for accreditation, thus avoiding a social desirability bias towards conforming respondent opinions to the mission-specific thrust of the new standards. Also, this study only included deans from AACSB member schools of business. Finally, the research set out to test a specific null hypothesis of homogeneity among AACSB member deans.

Methods

Questionnaire

The instrument consisted of 55 questions, covering nine areas of concern for business school/college administrators: relations with the AACSB; relations with local/regional/national business community; faculty research; executive/management development; faculty consulting; school/college administration; curriculum; faculty recruiting and evaluation; and exit skills of graduates. The specific questions within these nine categories were scored on a seven-point Likert scale, with "one" representing "very strongly disagree" and "seven" indicating "very strongly agree". The final page of the questionnaire solicited information regarding the characteristics of the respondent's campus, as well as some information about the respondent.

Respondents

A current AACSB listing of deans of accredited business schools/colleges was employed as a mailing list. All regularly appointed deans ($n=253$, omitting "acting" or "interim"), were mailed a package containing a cover letter, the questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope. The package also included a postcard, which respondents could return as a separate mailing if they wished to receive the

descriptive findings of the study. Every attempt was made to keep respondents' names separate from their questionnaire responses. Overall, 124 deans provided usable responses for a 49 per cent response rate.

For this particular study, all reporting deans were classified into one of three categories, which were not identical to those of Porter and McKibbin (1988). Category one deans were from schools with doctoral programmes. The remaining category two and three schools did not have doctoral programmes and were constituted from schools with only masters and undergraduate degree offerings. In order to keep cell sizes roughly equal, the median ratio between bachelors and masters students was determined (13 per cent). Category two schools had masters enrolments in excess of 13 per cent of their bachelors programme and category three schools had masters enrolments which were less than 13 per cent of bachelors enrolments. This classification process provided the researchers with three groups of reporting deans, based on the emphasis between graduate and undergraduate education. This procedure for classifying AACSB accredited business programmes seemed to be quite consistent with the explicit statement of the accrediting body mentioned earlier. Specifically, "...schools with greater emphasis on graduate instruction relative to undergraduate instruction should place greater emphasis on intellectual contribution" (Final Report of The AACSB Accreditation Project, 1991, p. 31).

Results

Assessment of differences between the three groupings of deans on each of the 55 items of concern to the study were made through the application of the one-way analysis of variance test. In those instances where the analysis of variance indicated a difference between the three original groups, a Scheffe post comparison test was employed in order to reveal specifically which groups were accounting for the differences.

Of the 55 attitudinal viewpoints or questions on the original instrument, no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) were found for 40 of the items (72.7 per cent). It is important to note that no differences were found between the groupings of deans on the seven-item category dealing with "faculty". Further, only one of seven-items was significantly different for the category dealing with "business school graduates", and only one of six items was significant for the categories of "AACSB" and "business community". For the "administration" and "executive development" categories (four and three items, respectively) only a single item from each group was significant, and only two of the nine items from the "research" category were found to be significant. However, four of the five items from the "curriculum" category were significant and all four items from the "consulting" category were revealed to be statistically significant.

Overall, 15 items representing eight categories were found to be statistically different ($p > 0.05$) across the three groupings of deans. Table I provides a listing of the statistically different variables, along with the mean scores for each group of deans, as well as the associated F values and significance levels. A discussion of the results for each category of research areas now follows.

Table I.
Statistically Significant
Findings for Group
One, Two and Three
Schools

Variables	Group 1 n=32	Group 2 n=45	Mean responses ^a Group 3 n=47	F	Sig
<i>AACSB</i> The standards/guidelines of the AACSB should be more specific	3.19	2.87	4.23 ^{1,2}	9.21	0.0002
<i>Business community</i> American business leaders place strong value on business school accreditation by AACSB	4.09	3.56	4.45 ²	4.90	0.0009
<i>Research</i> The vast majority of business school research has not been applied in the business community In the next decade, business school deans should protect untenured faculty who investigate important, non traditional, research issues	5.03	4.42	5.17 ²	3.63	0.0294
<i>Executive development</i> The AACSB should be concerned with the quality of executive development offered by accredited business schools	4.50	5.20 ¹	5.23 ¹	4.42	0.0114
<i>Consulting</i> Our school of business encourages its faculty to participate in consulting activities In the next decade, it will become increasingly important for business school faculty, through their consulting activities, to pick up valuable work experience Business schools should encourage the business community to sponsor faculty internships Most of the business school faculty on our campus are not interested in consulting activities	3.81	4.93 ¹	4.66	5.09	0.0076
<i>Administration</i> The dean's responsibility in our school of business is more external than internal	4.59	5.38 ¹	5.26 ¹	5.68	0.0044
<i>Curriculum</i> Faculty in my school of business will need to become more involved in the development of new courses in the next decade In the next decade, my school of business should place more emphasis on graduate education and less on undergraduate	4.81	5.49 ¹	5.34	4.47	0.0134
<i>Business school graduates</i> A critical curriculum problem my school of business will face in the next decade concerns internationalizing the graduate and undergraduate programmes of study The curricula of a business school should establish direction for the business community A business school education should begin at the post-baccalaureate level	5.31	6.00 ¹	6.00 ¹	5.71	0.0043
	4.34	5.18 ¹	4.38 ³	5.31	0.0061
	4.78 ³	4.40 ³	3.70	7.29	0.001
	5.09	5.64 ¹	5.34	3.48	0.0341
	4.91 ³	4.31 ³	3.49	9.16	0.0002
	5.38 ²	4.60	4.66	3.87	0.0234
	5.13	5.22 ³	4.57	4.22	0.0169
	3.75 ³	3.22	2.79	3.15	0.0462

^a The superscript by the mean response indicates the group that differs from the mean at the 0.05 level, as revealed by the Scheffe procedure.

AACSB

One item in this category “the standards/guidelines of the AACSB should be more specific”, was found to be statistically different across the three categories of deans. Basically, the viewpoints of deans from schools with a predominantly undergraduate focus differed significantly with the deans of the other two groups. The latter two groups disagreed with the statement while the undergraduate group’s emphasis was essentially neutral. Here, the indication is that deans at the schools with stronger graduate focus want less specificity in the standards.

Business Community

The only significant item in this category stated that “American business leaders place strong value on business school accreditation by the AACSB”. The significant differences for this item were found between the non-doctoral schools. In this regard, the undergraduate-emphasis school deans, tended to agree with the statement, while masters-emphasis school deans were more inclined to disagree with it.

Research

Two of the items concerning the role of research indicated significant differences across deans’ groupings. The first of these indicated that “the vast majority of business school research has not been applied in the business community”. The significant difference was between the masters-emphasis and undergraduate-emphasis deans. All three groups agreed with the item, but the strongest agreement was among deans from undergraduate-emphasis schools.

The second research item suggested that “in the next decade, business school deans should protect untenured faculty who investigate important, but non-traditional research issues”. In this case, it was the deans from doctorate-granting programmes who were less strongly in favour of this position than their counterparts at category two and three schools.

Executive Development

Only one of the three items concerning executive development showed a significant difference. It maintained that “the AACSB should be concerned with the quality of executive development programmes offered by accredited business schools”. Once again, it was deans at doctoral schools who disagreed with this viewpoint while the other two groups of deans tended to agree, though significant differences only existed between the doctoral deans and the masters-emphasis deans.

Consulting

Four of the five items dealing with faculty consultancy were found to be statistically different across the three deans’ groupings. The first of these took the position that “our school of business encourages its faculty to participate in consulting activities”. Deans from doctorate-granting institutions were significantly less in agreement with this view than the deans from the non-doctoral schools.

A second consulting item held that “in the next decade, it will become increasingly important that business school faculty, through their consulting activities, pick up valuable business world experience”. Doctoral school deans were significantly less likely than masters-emphasis school deans to agree with this view. Views of deans of undergraduate-emphasis schools, tended to more closely resemble those of masters-emphasis schools.

The third significant consulting item stated that, “business schools should encourage the business community to sponsor faculty internships”. Again, doctoral school deans were significantly less enthused about this idea, than deans from either group of non-doctoral schools.

The final significant consulting item stated that “most of the business school faculty on our campus are not interested in consulting”. Here the pattern is different, it was deans from masters-emphasis schools, who agreed more strongly with this position than either of the other two groupings.

Administration

Of the four items relating to administration, only one item showed significant differences among the three groupings of deans. It stated that “the dean’s responsibility in our school of business is more external than internal (i.e., dealing with the business community as opposed to faculty and curriculum)”. Deans from undergraduate-emphasis schools tended to disagree mildly. Their answers differed significantly from those of deans in the other two groups; both of which tended to agree mildly.

Curriculum

All four items dealing with curriculum showed significant differences. The first alleged that “faculty in my school of business will need to become more involved in the development of new courses in the next decade”. All these groups agreed, but the agreement of the masters-emphasis group was stronger significantly than that of the doctoral-granting group.

The second curriculum item indicated that “in the next decade, my school of business should place more emphasis on graduate education and less on undergraduate”. As might be expected, the strongest disagreement came from deans of undergraduate-emphasis programmes, while mild agreement characterized the other two groups of deans.

The third curriculum item found to be different ($p < 0.05$) across the three groupings of deans stated that “a critical curriculum problem my school of business will face in the next decade concerns internationalizing the graduate and undergraduate programmes of study”. Strongest agreement was found among doctoral school deans, whose opinions differed significantly from those of the masters-emphasis schools. Opinions of undergraduate-emphasis deans, tended to resemble those of the masters-emphasis respondents, both agreed mildly.

The final curriculum issue was reflected in an item which stated “the curricula of a business school should establish direction for the business community”. Strongest agreement with this view was among masters-emphasis programme

deans, whose views differed significantly from those of undergraduate-emphasis programme deans. Views of deans of doctoral schools tended to resemble those of masters-emphasis deans.

Business School Graduates

Of seven items pertaining to business school graduates, only one was found to be statistically different across the deans' groupings. This item stated that "a business school education should begin at the post-baccalaureate level". None of the three groups agreed with this view, however, the strongest disagreement existed for the deans from undergraduate-emphasis programmes. Their views disagreed significantly from those of doctoral school deans, who were less negative towards this view. This finding supports the nomological validity of the study and matches *a priori* expectations.

Discussion

Given the recent passage of new AACSB accreditation criteria, business schools may now capitalize upon their unique strengths (e.g. theory building, professional relationships with the business community, teaching, etc.). Prior to the passage of this new set of standards, accredited business schools generally demonstrated overall high quality through an increasing emphasis on academic legitimacy (i.e. published research).

Within the framework of the prior accreditation process, some business schools have advocated research, not because it was central to a particular school's educational mission, but only because it was necessary to meet accreditation Standard IIIB (Porter and McKibbin, 1988). Further, Standard IIIB, which emphasized faculty scholarship, appeared to be a direct result of the Ford and Carnegie foundation reports of 1959. With the abolition of Standard IIIB, and the development of a new set of accreditation standards, which require outcome assessments to document mission compliance, schools no longer have to follow traditional definitions of quality. Historically, the "quality" of a business school was judged by such measures as the research productivity of its faculty, the number of prestigious grants awarded, student selectivity or admission standards and number of endowed chairs.

Despite the flexibility inherent in the new standards, the AACSB indicates that schools emphasizing graduate instruction, relative to undergraduate instruction should place greater emphasis on "intellectual contributions". Further, schools with a strong commitment to a doctoral programme should have a substantial emphasis on "basic scholarship". Alternatively, schools with a predominant emphasis on an undergraduate programme may have the focus of their intellectual contribution in "applied scholarship", while schools without a doctoral programme, but with a mix of undergraduate and graduate programmes, may have a balance between basic and applied scholarship.

On balance, the AACSB has created a structure which will enable schools to seek to incorporate academic and professional models into their statements of mission and ultimately their practices associated with education and research.

Clearly, it is the intention of the AACSB that the doctoral granting schools will focus on a more purely academic orientation, while the business programme at the small, liberal arts college may choose to pursue the more professional approach.

Given this set of intentions of the accrediting body, the current study has some interesting observations. Despite earlier theoretical contributions (Cheit, 1985) and the newly established standards of the AACSB, our research notes few distinctions in the viewpoints of deans across the three groupings. As stated earlier, on 40 of the 45 items covered in the original survey, no significant differences among dean groupings were found. Further, the content areas characterized by a lack of differences were particularly noteworthy; specifically, with respect to such matters as research, faculty expectations, business school graduates, the AACSB and business community relations, extremely few differences were found.

The implications of the above findings might suggest that the expectations of the AACSB with respect to the "academic" and "professional" models may not be fully actualized in the near term. For example, the notion that deans from different categories of schools would have differing preferences for basic versus applied research was simply not supported by this study. In turn, this also helps to support the position that deans of accredited business schools tend to have homogenous attitudes regarding a central theme (i.e. research) in the new AACSB accreditation standards.

Support for distinctive mission orientations across the three categories of deans was found to exist primarily in the areas of curriculum and consulting. Since consulting is only of minor significance to the AACSB, the findings of the present study seem to suggest that the systematic differences in the mission statements of various types of schools, expected by the AACSB, may occur primarily in the curriculum arena.

It seems apparent from the new AACSB accreditation standards that the association's intent is to provide accreditation as an incentive for excellence in a more diverse group of collegiate schools of business. A probable consequence of the new mission-driven standards may be an increase in the number of accredited schools associated with smaller liberal arts institutions. Historically, these programmes have been precluded from accreditation by the AACSB for a variety of reasons, including scholarship. The authors suggest that the current study should be replicated after a substantial number of these have achieved accreditation. It seems possible that such a replication would find a greater degree of diversity in attitudinal viewpoints.

In conclusion, to the extent that the AACSB is advocating an accreditation process, which is built on an assumption of heterogeneity of business programmes, our preliminary findings suggest this assumption may be premature at this time. However, the authors also recognize that the introspective process, associated with the generation of a mission statement, may tend to sharpen the differences among categories of schools. Depending on the manner by which the new accreditation standards are operationalized by the deans who form accreditation and visitation committees, the process *may* result in more diversity among accredited schools.

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