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Applying Logic Modeling to the Higher Education Accreditation Process

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Abstract

In recent years, regional accreditation and the regional accreditation associations for higher education have experienced continuing criticism and become the objects of increased scrutiny. Higher education institutions look to the accreditation process as one of the principal means of justifying their actions and activities relative to their performance and results. Since the complaints and criticism directed toward higher education have not diminished but continued, and even increased, the regional accreditation associations find themselves to be the focus of similar complaints and criticisms.

In the United States, we have no national system of accreditation. We rely on the actions and activities of one of the six regional accreditation associations. Each of these associations has its own separate and, in some cases, unique accreditation processes. Each publishes its own standards, its own handbooks, its own policies and practices, its own newsletters, and its own rules and regulations for accreditation. This situation can lead to inconsistencies, and could be a source of much confusion and misunderstanding when discussing the implications of an institution being accredited within a particular region.

Logic models are diagrams or visual schematics that convey relationships between program processes and outcomes. This study uses logic modeling and logic model theory as the framework for an examination of the components of accreditation within two regional accreditation associations. A systematic and detailed methodology was developed in order to construct a logic model from existing handbooks and documents. As a result, two regional logic models were constructed, as well as a combined model based upon common elements. Implications of this study include the possible construction of a national accreditation logic model if the methodology is applied in the additional regional associations. This conceptual

approach could lead to more consistency in the design, communication, and application of accreditation processes. Better understanding of, and less confusion concerning, the myriad of activities and processes required in a successful regional accreditation could lead to better, more effective, and more meaningful accreditation activities and results. This, in turn, could generate true growth and improvement in the actions, activities, and results achieved by our higher education institutions.

Chapter One

Study Overview

Introduction

- "Accreditation, the primary quality control process for postsecondary education, does not provide useful information to the public. It focuses on inputs and on processes, not the consumer" (Miller & Malandra, 2006).
- "How can the accreditation system be held more accountable for assuring performance, including student-learning outcomes, in accrediting institutions and programs?"(Schray, 2006).
- "Accreditation of higher education in the United States is a crazy-quilt of activities, processes and structures that is fragmented, arcane, more historical than logical, and has outlived its usefulness. Most important, it is not meeting the expectations required for the future" (Dickerson, 2006).

These three quotations can be found on the U. S. Department of Education website. They are taken from three of fifteen issue papers written by members of The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. This commission was formed by Secretary Spellings "…to launch a robust national dialogue on the vital issues of accessibility, affordability and accountability" (Spellings [remarks], 2006).

During the course of this commission's "dialogue" many meetings were held, many forums were held, and many persons were asked for or gave their opinions. When The Commission's report (*A Test of Leadership, Charting the Future of U. S. Higher Education*) was finally published, it contained the following comment on the system of accreditation in this country: "Accreditation, the large and complex public-private system of federal, state and

private regulators, has significant shortcomings. Accreditation agencies play a gatekeeper role in determining the eligibility of institutions and programs to receive federal and state grants and loans. However, despite increased attention by accreditors to learning assessments, they continue to play largely an internal role. Accreditation reviews are typically kept private, and those that are made public still focus on process reviews more than bottom-line results for learning or costs. The growing public demand for increased accountability, quality and transparency coupled with the changing structure and globalization of higher education requires a transformation of accreditation" (Pre Publication Copy, September, 2006).

Whether it wants to be where it is or not, accreditation currently finds itself in what might best be described as a bit of a quandary. Government regulators, state legislators, consumer advocates, and the public consumers of educational products and services are looking for some serious answers from accreditation. In addition, these constituencies also want reassurances, and, in some instances, perhaps even guarantees from accreditation. Whether or not it is even reasonable for these groups to have these expectations of accreditation is not the focus of this paper. The fact of the matter is that institutions of higher education in this country, along with our primary and secondary educational institutions, have come under fire, and find themselves the subject of much discontent and criticism.

People are looking for answers…they are looking for direction…they are looking for help and hope regarding the problems they see in education today. My belief is that there are no simple, direct, and straightforward answers to the questions, just as there are no simple causes and reasons for the current situation. Accreditation cannot and should not be held accountable or called to task for not "curing" all of our ills. It is only one element, only one variable in the polynomial equation we call education. Since there are so many variables that influence and

have an effect on the resulting "solution" to this equation, it stands to reason that there would be more than one way to "solve" the problem—if, indeed, there even is an ultimate solution. Accreditation certainly does have a role to play in this process. Not everyone agrees on what that role is, or on how this role should play-out in future events and actions. Accreditors do not want to surrender their current positions. There has not been one instance to date of any of the six regional accreditors offering to "surrender" their positions to some other group of faction that has criticized them or implied that they could have done a better job. In fact, the opposite is true. In a response to continuing criticisms that arose during the congressional debate over the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Judith Eaton, the president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, responded: "Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act continues into 2005. This debate will continue as well. … Whatever the outcome of the reauthorization, we need to protect the vibrancy and value of accreditation" (Eaton, J., 2005). Accreditors, across the board, have made changes in recent years in attempts to acknowledge valid criticisms and to improve their processes and results. Still, there is no end to the critics, no end to the accusations, no end to the finger-pointing, and no end to the problems our educational institutions are facing.

This study is an attempt to suggest one possible way to improve or modify the ultimate results of the accreditation process. A focus on some of the more relevant background information will help with understanding and explaining how accreditation came to find itself in this current position.

Background

"The United States has no Federal Ministry of Education or other centralized authority exercising single national control over postsecondary educational institutions in this country. The States assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs" (U S Dept of Education, Overview of Accreditation). As a consequence to this "official position" of not having an official position, we currently depend upon a voluntary system of institutional self-governance which has evolved over time.

"In order to insure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope have adopted criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and have developed procedures for evaluating institutions or programs to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality" (US Department of Education, Overview of Accreditation).

According to a special report prepared by the National Policy Board on Higher Education Institutional Accreditation, this history of "self governance" began over 200 years ago in 1784 with the establishment of the New York Board of Regents, which held "regulatory, planning, and licensing authority over all educational institutions" (National Policy Board, October, 1994). Currently, the 50 States each assume varying degrees of control over higher education, based upon their state constitutional authority. Only one state has the power to accredit: "Under current law, the only state with that power is New York, which was grandfathered in when Congress passed a 1991 law barring other states from accrediting colleges. New York uses its

power sparingly; the state's Board of Regents accredits only 20 small private institutions" (Bollag, 2005).

The development of accreditation as a profession changed dramatically beginning in the early 1900's. In 1910, The North Central Association developed the "first college and university accreditation effort" (National Policy Board, October 1994). Also in 1910, another very important evaluation took place: "The Flexner Report of 1910 was an evaluation of medical education in all programs in Canada and the US—Flexner found medical education wanting and his report lead to significant changes in medical education. But for evaluators, the importance of this report is that it was the genesis of accreditation—a model of evaluation based on expert, professional judgement [sic]" (Mathison, 2006). From these beginnings, accreditation continued to develop. While accreditation has always been important to academia, for a long while it did not operate in its current, highly visible position. Initially, a lack of accreditation or the loss of accreditation was not considered as onerous to institutions as it is today. Beginning with the middle of the 20th Century, the environment for accreditation began to change.

Until the late 1950's, most Americans probably felt that they lived in the best-educated of the world's nations. It stood to reason that if they had one of the world's best standards of living, it would therefore follow that their schools should be among the best also. With the launching of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957, we as a nation were made to face the fact that we were not necessarily technologically and educationally superior to the rest of the world, especially the Communist Bloc. The resulting fear generated in this country by the launching of this satellite led eventually to our placing more emphasis on our education system and on the development of our national technology. It was at this time that the formal "…practice of accreditation in the United States began in the early 1960's as a means for post-secondary educational institutions

(colleges and universities) to demonstrate to the Federal government a basic level of quality in their institution and programs for the purpose of certifying eligibility to receive Federal funds, which include Stafford loans, grants, and research monies. A non-governmental peer process of evaluation of post-secondary educational institutions and programs was established, developed and administered by private educational associations and commissions of regional or national scope." (NAPCIS, 1995-2006).

Until recent years, this system of national and regional associations and commissions has operated in a relatively autonomous manner and certainly has not occupied a very high-profile in the consciousness of lawmakers, consumer advocates, and the public at large. "In higher education, public financing and affirmative action have occupied the vast attention of [state] policymakers. While such issues as merit scholarships, income tax credits, and college access and admissions have dominated postsecondary policymaking at the state level, higher education assessment policies and regional accreditation assessment standards have been operating underneath the radar. Despite their relative invisibility, however, state assessment policies and regional accreditation assessment standards and criteria have emerged and matured as integral components of governance and quality assurance in higher education" (Nettles, Perorazio, and Cole, 2002). Unfortunately, this maturation of accreditation's status has also lead to a higher profile with more visibility—and more questioning—as this presumed instrument of quality assurance has come under fire.

As indicated previously, there are still many criticisms of accreditation. There are those who would have us change accreditation, and some who would even have it eliminated and replaced with something completely different than the system we know today. It is easy to find criticisms of just about anything in our society today, whether those criticisms are of societal,

political, social, or educational institutions. Just finding a plethora of criticism in a particular area doesn't necessarily indicate serious problems, nor does it lead to finding the real causes of the problem or to finding its solution. The key in evaluating and weighing criticisms is to find those criticisms which represent more than just emotional, gut reactions or knee-jerk responses to situations that author happen not to appreciate. After reading and understanding any found critiques and criticisms, it is important to attempt to see what those criticisms are really saying and determine if there are common themes or common criticisms. A review of the some of the criticisms and observations about accreditation appears in the literature review.

In looking at higher education accreditation, one realizes early on that there are a great many organizations and associations that confer accredited status upon programs, departments, fields of study, and, of course, institutions. This study is limited to those organizations that confer accreditation upon higher education institutions. While there are quite a few organizations that confer accreditation on various fields of study or programs, there are currently only six organizations that are approved by the U. S. Department of Education to confer accredited status upon institutions. Those six organizations are the Regional Accreditation Organizations. This study, therefore, will be limited to members of those associations. For practical purposes, this study is limited to two of the six regional associations. The two regional associations chosen for investigation and analysis are The Commission on Colleges of The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and The Higher Learning Commission of The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Theoretical Logic Model Support / Framework

There were many times in the developmental stages of this study when the literature search itself proved to be a major hurdle. The fact is that there is not a plethora of research that

has been done or is being done in the area of accreditation. This limitation became a major factor in determining the direction the study would take, and will be discussed in detail when addressing the literature review. The considerable overlapping of the terminology of accreditation with other fields not directly associated with higher education accreditation in many cases resulted in searches that lead to blind alleys.

After searching the available literature using descriptors such as "Higher Education" + "Accreditation," or "Higher Education" + "Evaluation," a document from the W K Kellogg Foundation was found. This document, the Evaluation Handbook, is published and made available online, and it proved to be of real benefit in terms of developing a theoretical framework for this study. At an early point in the review of this document, the concept of Theory based evaluation was presented. "Theory based evaluation starts with the premise that every social program is based on a theory—some thought process about how and why it will work. This theory can either be explicit or implicit. The key to understanding what really matters about the program is through identifying this theory (Weiss, 1995). This process is also known as developing a program logic model—or picture—describing how the program works" (Evaluation Handbook, pg. 11). This introductory discussion of logic models subsequently led to the Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide. After reading these publications, the possibility of using an underlying logic mode as a framework for investigating and disseminating the institutional evaluation processes came to mind. Would it be possible to show that there existed, in fact, a logic model at the basis of the accreditation/evaluation process? If it were possible to confirm the existence of a logic model basis for the evaluation processes of one of the regional accreditation associations, then it might also be possible to confirm a logic model at the basis of another of the regional accreditation associations' evaluation processes. The

implications of this study—and further studies—could be far reaching. If an underlying accreditation logic model could be identified and established for two of the regional associations, then it should be possible to compare and contrast those two models. It might also be possible to propose a logic model that could be utilized on a more wide-spread basis. At this point, proposing a unified logic model to be utilized as the basis for a national system of accreditation is premature. However, if there are differences in the evaluations that are performed by different associations, and also differences in evaluations that are performed by different teams within a single association, it seems likely that a unified logic model for evaluation could be useful in eliminating these regional and team differences. Thus, the purpose of this study can now be expressed: investigate and confirm the existence of underlying accreditation logic models; extract an accreditation logic model for two regional accreditation organizations; determine the feasibility of assembling a unified logic model from the two models. If successful, propose further investigation of the remaining regional associations, with the ultimate goal of constructing a single, unified accreditation logic model.

It is essential at this point to understand the theoretical framework for developing logic models. Most persons who have some experience with logic modeling suggest that the modeling activities should come first, even before the program is designed and the program's activities are decided upon. Additionally, those with modeling experience say that it is best to start the modeling process by deciding what the anticipated or intended results of the program are likely to be. The following quotation from the Kellogg Logic Model Development Guide gives their rationale for doing this.

> 'Do the outcomes first' is sage advice. Most logic models lack specific short- and long-term outcomes that predict what will be achieved several years down the road.

> Specifying program milestones as you design the program builds in ways to gather the data required and allows you to periodically assess the program's progress toward the goals you identify. For that reason, Exercise 1[a practice exercise in the Development Guide] isn't filled out from left to right. This exercise asks you to 'do the outcomes first.' We will focus our attention first on what we have called 'your intended results' " (Logic Model Development Guide, 2004, pg. 16).

Dr. Beverly Anderson Parsons, a W K Kellogg Foundation Cluster Evaluator, also states her position in the Development Guide: "Over the past few years, I have markedly changed my approach to logic modeling. I have become convinced that it makes a considerable difference if you do the outcomes before planning the activities. I definitely advocate doing the outcomes first! I find that people come up with much more effective activities when they do. Use the motto, 'plan backward, implement forward' " (Parsons, 2004, from a side-bar quote in the *Logic Model Development Guide*, pg. 15).

The prevailing thought of most authors regarding the basics of logic modeling is that as the program's design and implementation decisions are being made, having an eye focused on the outcome measures will help to enhance the ultimate success. Logic modeling will accomplish this by allowing those persons involved with and responsible for programs to notice potential problems sooner. "As you implement your program, outcome measures enhance program success by assessing your progress from the beginning and all along the way. That makes it possible to notice problems early on. The elements (Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact) that comprise your intended results give you an outline of what is most important to monitor and gauge to determine the effectiveness of your program. You can correct and revise based on your interpretation of the collected data" (Logic Model Development Guide, 2004, pg. 16).

The literature describes many benefits and reasons for using logic modeling. Foremost among them are these views listed in a PowerPoint slide presentation made by Ellen Taylor-Powell in March, 2005. "[Logic modeling]…Demonstrates accountability with focus on outcomes…Links activities to results: Prevents mismatches…Integrates planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting…Creates understanding…Promotes learning… [It is] a way of thinking—not just a pretty graphic" (Taylor-Powell, 2005).

This is the underlying motivation for attempting to extract a logic model from existing program evaluation processes. These benefits are, without question, extremely advantageous in the planning, designing, establishing, and installation phases of a new program. They could, therefore, be just as useful and valuable when used as a framework for examining the activities involved in previously established methods of program evaluation. This investigation of existing program evaluation methods could result in the development of a model for each association studied. If the resulting regional association evaluation models contain similar elements with regard to their design and implementation, they would be readily discernible. If, on the other hand, there are few, if any, similarities, the differences will also be readily apparent. These similarities and differences will greatly assist in the development of a unified accreditation model. Additionally, after additional study of the remaining four accreditation organizations, in theory it would be possible to propose a unified logic model for consideration and adoption by all of the regional accreditation associations.

The process of developing a logic model, on the surface, appears to be simple, easy and straightforward. Of those three descriptors, straightforward is the only one that is somewhat accurate. There is a straightforward process involved in linking the resources and/or inputs with the goals and objectives. While the concept of a logic model is somewhat easy to comprehend,

constructing one is another matter altogether. The simplicity of a logic model, for the most part, ends with this understanding of what it is and what its advantages are. The process of constructing the model requires those involved in the construction process to have as thorough a knowledge of as many details relating to their program as possible. Everyone involved should be aware of the basic characteristics of their program, its goals and objectives, the required activities, the required or available funding, the environment in which the program will be implemented, the talents and abilities of those who will be implementing it, and some idea of the overall time frame with reference to actually seeing any measurable results. Since there is no existing literature referencing the development of the current Accreditation processes of the two regional accreditation organizations being used for this study, it is assumed that the construction of their models will be complicated and will require a careful and well thought out plan for their development.

Need for Study

As previously indicated, there are perceived problems with the process of regional accreditation as it has been applied in the past. Its effectiveness and its results have been questioned. Additionally, there are different associations and organizations that promote their requirements and criteria for accreditation. The U S Department of Education has recognized six regional accreditation organizations, forty-eight professional and specialized accreditation organizations, two private career accrediting organizations, and four faith-based accrediting organizations. This represents the potential for many differences, and possibly even disagreement, in their accreditation methods and approaches, especially when one allows for the possibility that they each may be utilizing different approaches and/or methodologies. How might accreditation work if there is agreement on a logic model across the regions and the

professional organizations? How might accreditation work if the processes were more uniformly understood by those who participated in its myriad of activities on the multitude of campuses and institutional environments across this country? Would the results be more uniform…would the outcomes of the accreditation process be more positive and, more importantly, more effective and more lasting? Even though this study will only involve 2 of the 6 regional accrediting organizations, it would still have implications for all of the other accrediting bodies, especially if the results prove to be valuable and provide a worthwhile alternative to constructing a more effective accreditation process in the long run. For that reason alone, there is sufficient need for a study of this type.

A significant portion of those employed in higher education may have some ideas and concepts about the process and activities involved in the accreditation of their institution. It is likely that there are some who, based upon personal experiences on their campuses with accreditation and reaccreditation activities, may even have an intimate picture of what the process means in terms of the specific activities that occurred regarding their institution's receiving or renewing its accreditation with one of the six regional accreditation organizations. For each institutional employee who fits into this group, there are perhaps a great many more that will have a very limited picture, or perhaps no picture at all, regarding the accreditation process. It would stand to reason that every educational institution undergoing the process of accreditation would benefit from an increase in the depth of general knowledge and understanding of the accreditation process on the part of as many of their faculty and administrative staff as possible.

From the perspective of how consistently the principles of accreditation were actually applied both by the internal, self-study teams and by the external, visiting team, and from the

perspective of the actual consistency of the results during a given time and unique set of circumstances, it would be very difficult to draw generalities regarding a unified picture of the accreditation process. At best, there are perhaps only a very few persons on any institution's campus who actually have had more than one or two experiences with regional accreditation. To begin with, the process of institutional accreditation and re-accreditation is cyclical, occurring on a ten-year basis. Also, most of the regional accreditation organizations have been attempting to make changes in their processes to account for changing times and current ongoing criticisms. This suggests an inherent unfamiliarity with parts of the process since the last time one participated. Additionally, it would be a fair statement to say that not every one involved in the accreditation process fully understands much more than the basic purposes and directions for completing that portion of the accreditation process which involves them directly. Furthermore, the communication of the requirements is spotty at best on many campuses. Training for individuals who may wish to have some clearer understandings is very difficult to come by without attending regional conferences and meetings, which automatically incur significant individual or institutional costs. And, finally, on many campuses, either the same people generally get "drafted" onto the internal committees if they are available, or newer persons, not fully aware of both the personal and professional commitment required, will be selected to represent their department on the self-study committee. For all of the importance attached to the results of accreditation and/or re-accreditation, the process is amazingly ill-understood and meagerly communicated. Perhaps the application of logic modeling, and the incorporation of a resulting logic model (of the particular accreditation process being applied) into the introductory training and orientation meetings, would generate the advantage of a clearly defined and unified vision on the part of all who are to participate in the institution's upcoming accreditation

activities. With this additional understanding of and clarity of the goals, objectives and methodology that are about to be applied to the institution being accredited, those participating in the process will not only be more effective in carrying out their functions, but they will also generate and pass on this sense of purpose and accomplishment to all members of their institution of higher learning.

This discussion of the need for this study continues with a presentation of some of the general variables and inherent difficulties involved. This study is not about being right all the time, nor is it about having the most successful program, or the one with the most fantastic results. There are just too many differences—perhaps even from one day to the next—in people, their moods and attitudes, and circumstances such as time, place, environment, budget, method(s), or any of the hundreds of variables that have an effect on the ultimate results of any policy or program. One's goal should always be to try to become better, to try to be more effective, to try to have as much of a positive effect as possible under any given set of circumstances. In other words, successful programs and institutions have an obligation to try to raise the bar for all participants at the end of their application. Our higher educational institutions, public and private, are operating in an atmosphere of changing environments, changing attitudes, changing goals, changing expectations, changing participants, changing leaders, …the list could go on and on. They have been charged with achieving results…and the results that they achieve may or may not meet the expectations—whether spoken or implied, acknowledged or assumed—that have been placed upon them. This can lead to situations that are uncomfortable, at best, for these institutions.

Our higher educational institutions, as well as our primary and secondary institutions, are currently facing an ongoing crisis in this country with regard to their achievements and results.

Are these complaints and criticisms justified? Why are there criticisms if the institutions are achieving success? If the criticisms are real, then one would question why these institutions are not taking action or instituting corrections? Again, since it simply not possible to please everyone, it might be good to think of these crises in other ways. Perhaps they are simply cries from interested parties, whose concern is that our institutions are not, in their eyes, justifying their existence. Since, as already stated, every individual has his own set of expectations and perceptions of how those expectations ought to be met, it would be a difficult undertaking to attempt to provide this justification to each and every individual. Accreditation seems to be one viable route available to every institution that would provide this means of justification. Even though accreditation has undergone much change through its recent past, and is still experiencing many changes today, there are still many voices of criticism and discontent.

Does accreditation really work? In many respects, it seems to. Does it please everyone? It certainly seems that it does not. Can accreditation be improved? Everything can be improved. Can it do everything to please its critics? Certainly it cannot, but it could be more consistent. Is the accreditation process the same for each and every institution, and, more importantly, is it applied equitably to each institution undergoing the process? Without studying the phenomenology—there will always be inherent time, situational, personal, and operational differences that will affect each outcome—that would be hard to comment upon, at least with any degree of certainty. That is where this study is applicable and has a role to play: If it is possible to assure that the basic underlying design, theoretical and operational content, and philosophy of the accreditation processes were constructed to be as consistent as possible across regions, it might then be possible to have more of a sense of uniformity, and, ultimately, more confidence in the results of its application. For that reason, this study of two of the regional

accrediting agencies should help in uncovering and accounting for any similarities and differences that may be found.

Philosophical Support

It is important to believe that everyone involved in the educational process wants it to be successful—not just narrowly successful, but exceptionally successful. The critics of our higher education institutions and of our current system of accreditation are no different. People do not usually criticize what they are happy with, so it stands to reason that the critics, both inside and outside of higher education, see room for improvement. The specific difficulty here is that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to get all of the critics to agree on what the improved product should look like or resemble. Since it is not possible to please everyone, just as it is not possible to be correct all of the time, what is needed is a way to generate improvement—both within our higher education institutions and within our accepted principles and practices of regional accreditation.

At this current time, our public institutions of higher education and many of their programs of study are expected to engage in a periodic process of approval, acceptance, or accreditation. The same is true for private institutions, but only to the extent that their ability to secure federal funds is involved. The six regional accreditation organizations have remarkable power over the continued operation of an institution. The forty-eight national associations and bodies recognized by the federal government as accrediting agents also exercise tremendous influence. Because of the sheer number of higher education institutions and the great variances in their missions, the individualistic nature of the professional accreditation organizations, and the acknowledged differences in regional accreditation, it is no surprise that critics call it fragmented, complicated, expensive, time consuming, and unwieldy. These disparities can be

compounded when the processes are applied at various times, in various locations, and by various assemblages.

This study is an effort, on an introductory basis, to examine the possibility of bringing some amount of cohesiveness and consistency to the process. If the accreditation process can be presented and explained—in training meetings, self-study meetings, institutional administration meetings, etc.—to participants and stakeholders in a clear, concise, logical, and understandable fashion, the likelihood is that it will be communicated more accurately and understood more precisely. If the process is more precisely understood, both philosophically and conceptually, by those who are participants in it at its various levels, the chances are that the end results of the application process will stand up under greater scrutiny and inspection. The reported results will carry more meaning, and they will be a more accurate reflection of what is actually occurring. If the subsequent results of the accreditation process are more accurate and more meaningful, then the results should lead to more institutional awareness and educational growth and development—which, in the final analysis, is what the regional accreditation organizations are trying to achieve.

Statement of Problem

Very simply put, our system of accreditation by regional organizations has been under fire for years, and it still is today. These complaints and criticisms traverse a wide continuum. There are those who feel that accreditation has failed; there are those who feel that it needs to be changed and modified; and there are some who feel that it should be eliminated. Current ideas for change and improvement also run a wide gamut. These complaints, criticisms , and ideas are discussed in more detail in the literature review.

Accreditation is highly important to the life's blood of most institutions: federal funds and scholarships and grants. Moreover, maintaining accreditation is essential to assuring an adequate supply of future higher education applicants. Accreditation needs to be better understood, better communicated to all stakeholders, and applied under conditions that minimize questionable results and multiple interpretations of said results. Since accreditation is performed by a wide variety of organizations, under widely varying and different conditions, and with different constituencies' participation, it would make sense to assure as much consistency as possible in the understanding of, the communication of, the design of, and the implementation of the accreditation process.

This study focusing on the accreditation processes of two of the six major regional accreditation organizations, with an emphasis on revealing the underlying logic models of the two programs, will help to illuminate inherent similarities and differences. An analysis of these similarities and differences should help in the postulation of a single cohesive logic model that could be considered as a basis framework for aligning various methods and programs of accreditation. This single logic model would contain the similar characteristics, what is considered to be the more valuable of the dissimilar characteristics, and additional characteristics that the research and current ideology deem to be appropriate for inclusion.

Terminology

"Accreditation"… "Program Approval"… "Assessment"… "Evaluation" …these words and their related activities can have deep, even visceral, effects on persons who are exposed to them—whether through reading about the process or through personally experiencing an accreditation. This proliferation of terms, with so many varied and different meanings and

interpretations, can lead to confusion, missed communication, and even inappropriate decisions and reactions.

As educators, we should be keenly aware of the power of the words we use when attempting to convey our thoughts and our intentions to those in our audience. Our words and our statements sometimes may even take on a life of their own in the minds of readers and listeners. With regard to accreditation and its processes it should go without saying that it is critical that every reader or listener understand the meanings and intentions of the words being used when one is stating a position, attempting to prove a point, or conveying a critique. One author who has addressed this issue and done so, and quite admirably, in my opinion, is James W. Popham:

> Once upon a time there was a word. And the word was evaluation. And the word was good. … Teachers used the word in a particular way. Later on, other people used the word in a different way. After a while, nobody knew for sure what the word meant. But they all knew it was a good word. Evaluation was a thing to be cherished. But what kind of a good thing was it? More important, what kind of a good thing is it? (Popham, 1993, p.1).

When W. James Popham used those opening lines in chapter one of his text book in 1975, he alluded to the fact that many people were using the word in many different ways to mean many different activities. He continues to discusses the "terminology jungle" that one finds in a youthful field of specialization where there has not been enough time for people to become comfortable with the peculiar terms of the specialty. Based upon current experience, this situation has not really changed—there still is a bit of a terminology jungle. In conducting this research, I have begun to identify any number of personal positions and stances with which I

am comfortable and with which I can identify. For those two reasons, and to accurately reflect the meaning I am endorsing with regard to the terminology used in this paper, a number of definitions are necessary.

The definitions selected for inclusion here are taken from *Evaluation Thesaurus, Fourth Edition*, written by Michael Scriven. It should be understood that this text is not solely a dictionary or thesaurus. Scriven includes many of his personal views and comments along with detailed explanations he provides. Scriven offers what I believe is adequate justification for this approach in the following quotation, taken from the introduction:

> …The third aim, and the most important one, is to generate a radical alteration in the attitude toward the process and nature of evaluation itself. At the general level, it is hoped that the arguments here destroy the intellectual foundations of the doctrine of value-free science, and hence open the doors to improving evaluation in and with the help of science. …usually ascribed to the recognition of two facts: that scientists' personal values play an important role affecting their choice of field and of explanatory models and that science has substantial social consequences. … For the future, the hope is that this approach will liberate evaluation from the strong chains that still bind it, so that work on it as a discipline in its own right will accelerate, and will produce a substantial range of benefits to thought and practice (Scriven, 1991, p.2).

The following definitions have been taken entirely from Scriven's *Evaluation Thesaurus*. Some of them are lengthy, and no quotation marks have been used. Each of the following definitions includes Scriven's comments and additional thoughts and reflections he may have chosen to include. The page number indicating the beginning of the discussion of each word or

phrase is indicated in the parenthesis immediately following the word. Any comments or parentheses he has used are included as he made them. Words are highlighted, italicized, bolded, or capitalized as he has them in the thesaurus.

- **Bias Control** (pg 69): A Key part of evaluation design. It should be seen, not as an attempt to exclude the influence of definite views, but to limit the influence of unjustified views, e.g., premature or irrelevant views. … The general principle of bias control…is the principle of *balancing* (possible) bias in a group of evaluators rather than *eliminating* bias by selecting only "unbiased" evaluators.
- **Conflict of Interest** (pg 88): One of many sources of bias, not always fatal to objectivity, bat fatal to credibility and hence incompatible with public or other responsible office. The legal definition relates to the clash between private pecuniary interest and the public interest, but in evaluation COI has a much wider scope and its effects on validity and professionalism, not just on credibility, must be examined. … Since COI may affect validity, and almost always reduces credibility, it is normally better to try to minimize the risk of it by using at least a mixture of **internal** and **external** evaluators in the development process. … The general level of thought about COI, in the media, in education, among politicians, and in legislation [as opposed to legal thought] is abysmal.
- **Evaluation Anxiety** (pg 145): Anxiety provoked by the prospect, imagined possibility, or occurrence of an evaluation.

- **General Positive Bias (GPB)** (pg 175): There is a strong GPB across all evaluation fields—a tendency to turn in more favorable results than are justified. … GPB is pervasive in program evaluation mainly because of role-conflict. The evaluator is a staff member, a contractor, or a consultant, and in that role knows that his or her own chance of future employment or contracts usually depends on or is enhanced by giving a favorable report on the program. … GPB can only be controlled by methods explicitly aimed at it; for example, by developing and enforcing strict standards for evaluation, by regular use of metaevaluation, by explicitly rewarding justified criticism, by taking action against supervisors that exhibit or tolerate GPB, by improving professional training and raising the consciousness of professionals in other ways, and by setting up independent evaluation units …
- **Institutional Evaluation** (pg 196): A complex evaluation, typically involving the evaluation of a set of programs provided by an institution plus an evaluation of the overall management, publicity, personnel policies, and so on of the institution. The accreditation of schools and colleges is essentially institutional evaluation, though a very poor example of it. One of the key problems with institutional evaluation is whether to evaluate in terms of the mission of the institution or on some absolute basis.
- **Logic of Evaluation** (pg 216): The key function of evaluative inference is moving validly to evaluative conclusions from factual (and of course definitional) premises; so the key task of the logic of evaluation is to show how

this can be justified. Doing this is a task that was and still is thought to be impossible by most logicians and scientists—social scientists in particular.

- **Phenomenology of Evaluation** (pg 262): An aspect or neighbor of the relatively unexplored domain of the **psychology of evaluation**. Apart from the anecdotal business of how it feels to evaluate and be evaluated, from which some insights could well be obtained into better (that is, more effective, more humane, more responsible) methods of doing and presenting evaluation, there are certain highly functional aspects of the experience that deserve more attention. Refocusing is one of these; another concerns the intimate interplay between the creative, critical, and data-gathering aspect of evaluation; a third concerns the role of empathy in the evaluator's mentation, actually and ideally.
- **Politics of Evaluation** (pg 268): If one has a favorable attitude toward politics, or uses the term without pejorative connotations, one will include virtually all program background and contextual factors in the political dimension of program evaluation and demand that it be taken into account in the design. The jaundiced view simply defines it as the set of pressures that are not related to the truth or merits of the case; and the jaundiced viewers remind us that evaluators are not, by mission or training, well qualified to be political analysts, and should be very cautions about venturing into the territory of **recommendations**, whose feasibility will be highly dependent upon political factors. (Of course, this is quite different from holding back on *conclusions*.)
- **Psychology of Evaluation** (pg 290): A little-explored domain which naturally divides into four parts—the psychology of (i) the evaluator, (ii) the evaluee, (iii)

the client, and (iv), the audiences for the evaluation. … Evaluation is a risky business—for the evaluator as well as the evaluee—and the causes of this are largely psychological. Evaluation threatens us where we live by raising the possibility of criticism of ourselves—or of our work, which we often see as an extension of ourselves—and, more mundanely, it may raise a threat to our job. Those possibilities are enough to raise anxiety in entirely sensible people, The immature or unbalanced individual or the pseudo-professional, on the other hand, reacts with an inappropriate level of anxiety, fear, hostility, and anger, often leading to incapacitating affect, unprofessional countermeasures, bizarre rationalizations like the doctrine of value-free science, or self-serving policies of incestuous evaluation. On the other side, of course, doing evaluation may represent an unhealthy lust for power rather than just the search for knowledge or the desire to provide a service to consumers and future consumers, service providers, citizens and other legitimate audiences.

- **Shared Bias** (pg 330): The principal problem with using experts' opinions as the basis for evaluation is that the agreement between them (if any) may be due to common error (known as shared bias). Obvious and serious examples occur in peer review of research proposals… and in **accreditation** (where the shared bias is due to a shared conflict of interest).

Assumptions

The major assumption made in conducting and completing this study, is that accreditation—not some nationalized replacement—has value, and is the path that higher education should choose and continue to follow. Additionally, even though there is no

consensus across the criticisms or within the critics of accreditation, it seems that it does have faults, and that there is room for improvement. There are many things about the phenomenology involved in the application the accreditation processes that cannot be accounted for and for which there are no controls. It is not be possible to remove all bias, or to eliminate the fear and insecurities that accreditation generates. It must be assumed that the logic model approach will be helpful in reducing variations and in promoting the collection of valid, meaningful data during all phases of the accreditation process. This assumption, coupled with a focus that is driven by a logic model approach to finding appropriate and meaningful accreditation goals and objectives, should result in a more accurate accreditation process—one which generates true growth and improvement for the institution being accredited. If the logic model approach can help to achieve this, the results should be more valuable, more meaningful, and more effective learning experiences for all students of our higher educational institutions.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study is that it is difficult to prove the hypothesis that a logic model would make any significant difference in the outcomes of the accreditation process. One of the major reasons for this situation is the phenomenology associated with the accreditation process. There are just too many variables i.e., biases, fears, goals, expectations, personal experiences, communication problems, and data collection to name a few. In quantitatively oriented experimental research, there would have to be methods of accounting for and controlling these factors. Perhaps this is one reason for the difficulty experienced in trying to locate any significant amount of accreditation research studies in the course of the literature search. There are, to be sure, a great number of reference articles, critiques, and opinions to be found relative to the subject of accreditation. There are certainly a good deal more to be found

today than were to be found five to ten years ago, before the subject of accreditation was to become so closely tied to the accountability and transparency problems that so many critics are lamenting in their current writings.

A qualitative study, on the other hand, could be interpreted by some as nothing more than a compilation of the attitudes, opinions, likes and dislikes of those asked to participate in the study. It would hardly be appropriate to propose changes and potential improvements based upon this type of data. The simple fact is that the critics and the criticisms overwhelm the studies and empirical data available. The limit to the quantifiable, hard and fast data available from accreditation research studies is simply not enough to base recommendations upon.

This study is neither quantitative nor qualitative. It is mixed, as it contains elements of each of the two major types. It contains as much quantitative data as can be developed from an examination and analysis written organization documents. It also contains qualitative data developed from an analysis and interpretation of the same documents.

It was extremely good fortune to find the references to logic modeling, and thus to develop the theoretical framework from which to operate. This limitation of not having a large amount of existing studies from which to operate has, in turn, fostered the belief that this work could, in fact, be valuable on its own, and could stand as one attempt to bring to the forefront more understanding of the goals and aims of the accrediting organizations. By incorporating an underlying logic model to the two regions being investigated, it should be possible to compare and contrast the two regions more effectively. Additionally, the use of logic models as a basis for developing the introductory and training materials necessary to convey the appropriate information to those participating in the accreditation process will help to insure its adequate communication. This in turn should lead to more effective evaluating, both on the part of the

self-study participants, and on the part of the members of the visiting teams. That is the ultimate goal of this study: more clarity of theoretical intent, purposes, and methods—which leads ultimately to a better accreditation process.

Delimitations

Unfortunately, even the most perfect and thorough study of any ideas that could be appropriate and helpful for improving the application of accreditation principles would, in the final analysis, be hampered by one simple fact: Regardless of how well any theory is defined, explained, detailed, and presented in training and communication activities, it is still subject to inherent differences in the results achieved. This is because the process will be applied in all aspects of the accreditation process by groups of individuals, all of whom could have widely varying and different backgrounds, different preferences, different experiences, different ideas, different ideologies, different politics, and different likes and dislikes. These variances and differences are further compounded and complicated by the existence of inherent fears, apprehensions, and potential misunderstandings to be found in the persons of those being evaluated. With this in mind, it is much easier to realize that it would be nearly impossible to eliminate all potential inequalities of application from the accreditation process.

Having stated this, it bears repeating that it was not a goal of this study to eliminate the effects of the phenomenology of accreditation. There will always be some of these effects, regardless of how well the process was designed or how thoroughly thought out it might have been. However, it is hoped that this study, by providing a means of promoting a more thorough understanding of the subtleties, nuances, and interrelationships involved, could be viewed as a starting point in the efforts to minimize the differences and to provide more cohesive, dependable results. It is reasonable to assume that if every individual involved in the process of

accreditation possesses a higher level of understanding and a more extensive comprehension of the goals, objectives, and methods to be employed, then the results achieved, from the data developed to the reports submitted and published, will take on greater significance, promote more confidence in the institution, and generate more real growth and improvement within the institution.

Basic Design

Based upon the recommendation of the graduate committee, two regional accreditation associations were selected for this study: The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and The Commission on colleges of The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These two associations were deemed by the committee to be appropriate for inclusion based upon their histories, their activities, and their philosophical approaches to accreditation.

All available documentation (handbooks, training materials, guidebooks, etc.) was analyzed and studied. From this analysis, a logic model of each accreditation process was developed. The models thus developed were compared and contrasted. Using the two models thus developed, a combined, single logic model has been proposed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Related EDUCATIONAL / RESEARCH Literature

Before opening up this discussion of the literature, it is appropriate to say that, especially in the past couple of years, the amount of written material covering the subject of accreditation has increased exponentially. Witness the following quotation: "Just a few years ago, almost no one saw accreditation as a major force for change in higher education. It was generally regarded as something of an anachronism, a ritual institutions had to go through periodically just to stay legit. But accreditation is back. Anyone who doesn't think so should try Googling 'accreditation': even with qualifying phrases like 'student learning' or 'accountability,' the curious reader would have to plow through nearly 200,000 web sites" (Wergin, J., 2005a). It hasn't always been this way; in the beginning stages of my research into accreditation, nearly 10 year sago, it was very difficult to find the quantity of material that is currently available for review.

It is important to characterize the general type of background materials and research literature available regarding the subject of accreditation and logic models. Because of accreditation's current notoriety, there is a relatively good amount of material available that is based on criticisms or opinions about accreditation and the state of our educational institutions. There is a surprisingly small amount of literature that has been generated as a result of true experimental inquiry in the area of accreditation. Among the definitions of the word "research", one finds the following: "…experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws…" (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997). The ideal

situation would one in which there was a great deal of literature in this experimental area. For whatever reasons, that is not the case. There simply has not been very much experimentation conducted concerning accreditation. For that reason, this literature search will center around one other definition for the word "research", namely: "…the collection of information about a particular subject" (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997).

Another aspect worthy of note in this discussion is that, while there are many graduate-level and practicum courses in Program Evaluation, there are almost no doctoral programs in that same area. An extensive search was conducted in October, 2006, and the only evaluation studies doctorate (Ph.D.) track to be found was in Evaluation Studies in Educational Policy and Administration [sic] at the University of Minnesota. There is also a doctoral program in Assessment and Measurement available at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. Beyond the aforementioned introductory graduate level courses and practicum courses in program evaluation (available at many institutions of higher education), the way that most persons interested in the area of accreditation receive experience is through attendance at seminars (which can be quite costly, and may only cover certain specific areas of the process), and by actually participating in the evaluation process—whether that process be through one of the regional accreditation organizations, or by working with local, acknowledged evaluators and consultants.

Early on in this literature search, it was necessary to deal with these facts and others as they impacted the available literature. Additionally, the profusion of and confusion in terminology relative to accreditation and evaluation was another cause for concern. This situation is compounded by the use, over use, and perhaps even the misuse of the language of accreditation. This can be partially attributed to the fact that there are many commercial and

educational applications utilizing the policies and procedures of accreditation/evaluation, and higher education certainly does not have any ownership on the appropriate words. It was necessary to carefully sift through the many pieces of literature found in order to be certain of their application. The situation relative to the amount of literature is now dramatically different, but the same difficulties arise in attempting to identify and use literature that represents accreditation research. Much of the literature is more limited in its scope i.e., it contains mostly criticisms and adverse opinions. Some of this literature is at best rather tainted by its opinionated slant. There is also a portion of the literature that may be of the type that lists problems and inconsistencies without offering constructive suggestions and alternatives in the presentation of the information. When examining the literature to determine its nature, one finds a large quantity concerning the lack of results of accreditation. There is also a small amount of literature that examines the processes of accreditation. There is not however, an overabundance of literature based on experimental inquiry into accreditation or its processes and methods. For this particular study, the literature search was conducted not only to find information on Accreditation, but also to discover information on Logic Models. Unfortunately, the same situation exists with regard to the available literature on the topic of logic models also.

There are, as previously noted, hundreds and thousands (over 20 million "hits" in fact) of websites that become available when conducting an electronic search for "Accreditation". When the search is further refined with the addition of "Higher Education", that number becomes a more manageable 170,000! Of course, not all of the resulting sites are actually useable. There are many accreditation areas—health counseling, engineering, private schools, religious schools, etc.—that are far too specific or do not relate as directly to this more generalized study. When these sites are visited and examined, it becomes clear that there are only a few, perhaps 30 or so,

that are useful in a study of this type. Many sites repeat information already found, or present only specific portions of materials that can be found in total at other sites. The situation is similar regarding the subject of Logic Models. Approximately 200,000 sites are revealed, but many of those are specific to certain programs, or states, or community action programs. There are only a small number that deal with the concept of "logic models" in a general, non-specific way, and much of the information found on these sites is based on or modeled after publications found on the larger, more developed organizations' websites, such as the W K Kellogg Foundation—a major source of grants funding—and the Rand Corporation—a major, recognized consultation organization—have proved to be an excellent source of information about logic models.

After a thorough review of the many and varied literature sources mentioned above, it was decided to rely primarily upon the following as sources for literature regarding the accreditation of institutions of higher education: The Chronicle of Higher Education, The Council for Higher Ed Accreditation (CHEA), The U. S. Department of Education, and Journals of Professional Education and Accreditation-related Organizations.

The Chronicle of Higher Education

The Chronicle of Higher Education is a highly respected national newspaper focusing on higher education issues. It accomplishes its reporting functions and actions without overly sensationalizing or trivializing any of its subjects. For many years, it has presented its articles with fairness and objectivity. Because of the fact that accreditation has found itself in the spotlight so much recently, The Chronicle has been a reliable place to start looking, especially for any events that have newly occurred, and which could have an effect on higher education accreditation. For example, it was during a search of The Chronicle, that the creation of the

Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education (Spellings Commission) was revealed. Using the following key/search words, and refining the search to include only exact matches, the following references were found in searching the past three years of The Chronicle:

"Higher Education Accreditation"……..20 articles

"Accreditors"……..……57 articles

"Accreditation"……..228 articles

Obviously, each of these "hits" has to be read and inspected to determine its usefulness and viability, just as when using other search engines. The Chronicle articles published during the past few years all serve to illuminate the current position in which higher education and its accreditors find themselves. For this particular section, the more recent articles dealing with the issues of criticism and the alleged "failure" of accreditation are presented:

- February 23, 2007: "Accreditors and the Education Department will complete a three-day round of talks today on the government's efforts to use accrediting groups to carry out some of the recommendations of last fall's report of the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education. That report called for greater accountability and more information about colleges, to facilitate easier comparisons of institutions. (2nd paragraph) In the first two days of this week's hearing, accreditors already succeeded in pushing back what is probably the department's most controversial proposal: having accreditation groups set minimum standards for "student achievement" at the colleges they oversee" (Bollag, B., 2007)

- November 30, 2006: “Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said on Wednesday that she will move quickly to improve accreditation, saying the system must become more focused on student-learning outcomes. (2nd paragraph) "We need to get about the business of making this system work better," the secretary said in a speech at an accreditation forum she convened here in response to a report she received in August from her Commission on the Future of Higher Education” (Field, 2006)
- November 3, 2006: “While American higher education is becoming more global and less dependent on classroom-based learning, accreditation remains "one of the biggest barriers to innovation," according to the chairman of the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (2nd paragraph) Accreditation is an "insiders' game" that focuses excessively on "inputs," like the number of books in a college's library, and insufficiently on what colleges are adding to their students' education, said the chairman, Charles Miller. (3rd paragraph) Speaking in Boston to about 260 college leaders and others at a conference titled "The Future of Higher Education in a Borderless World," Mr. Miller said existing approaches to accreditation inadequately addressed the needs of colleges to adapt to the changing world” (Blumenstyk, G., 2006).
- October 6, 2006: “Right now accreditation is the system we use to put a stamp of approval on higher-education quality. It's largely focused on inputs — more on how many books are in a college library than whether students can actually understand them. Institutions are asked, "Are you measuring student learning?" And they check yes or no. … That must change. Whether students are learning is

not a yes-or-no question. … To that end, Action 5 under my plan will convene members of the accrediting community this November to move toward measures that place more emphasis on learning. … This is the beginning of a process of long-overdue reform. …" (Spellings, M., 2006).

- September 8, 2006: "I think the accreditation process will become much more public and transparent. I believe the process will improve significantly because of that and will help both the accreditors and the institutions. I believe the focus will be more on institutional outcomes, including program outcomes, student learning, and productivity and efficiency of institutions. It's not clear what structural changes will take place, but it seems to me that geographical boundaries are not fully descriptive of the world we live in today" (Miller, C., 2006)
- September 1, 2006: "Last March the Commission on the Future of Higher Education released a discussion paper that proposed dismantling the current accreditation system. The paper, which was vehemently attacked by accreditors and some higher-education leaders, called for legislation to establish a national accreditation body to replace the six regional accreditors that oversee 3,000 institutions" (Bollag, 2006).
- April 14, 2006: "Accreditors and some college groups are aghast at a proposal to eliminate regional accreditors and replace them with a national accreditation body. The proposal is contained in a discussion paper …released by the secretary of education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. … The current accreditation system has failed, the paper contends, in large part because the

regional accrediting organizations are controlled by the institutions they monitor" (Bollag, B., 2006).

- December 9, 2005: The Chronicle reported on a bill introduced in the House of Representatives that would have severely affected accreditation and its reporting processes. "…Republican lawmakers introduced a sweeping piece of higher-education legislation …they included in it provisions intended to end the secrecy that surrounds the way colleges and universities are accredited….to help consumers make more informed choices about colleges by making the accreditation system more transparent" (Bollag, B., 2005).
- April 8, 2005: After two institutions secured injunctions against SACS,(which had revoked their accreditation), Jon W. Fuller, a consultant on accreditation with the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, said "… A new chapter is opened. It's going to require accreditors to really question some of their procedures" (Bollag, B., 2005).
- January 14, 2005: "External reviews are a fact of academic life. Provosts routinely assemble review teams to gauge how a department is performing or how it compares with its peers nationally. But while some institutions publish detailed procedures for evaluating programs, the nuts and bolts of the actual review visits are never discussed in polite company, certainly not in front of the children. …just as most people don't volunteer for strip searches, departments seldom elect the full-frontal exposure that a review entails" (Baron, D., 2005). Further on we read that those involved in a review sometimes approach it with timidity, if not

outright fear: "…the chairwoman had never even seen the provost's charge to our committee and could only fear the worst" (Baron, 2005).

- September 3, 2004: "…Regional accrediting agencies need to keep serving as a bridge…to develop better ways to measure student-learning outcomes and communicate their work to the public" (Reed, C., and Rust Jr., E., 2004).
- March 12, 2004: The American Council of Trustees and Alumni "…has condemned the accreditation system for failing to ensure academic quality, is leading a campaign to persuade lawmakers to remove a provision from the Higher Education Act that requires colleges to be accredited in order for them to award federal student aid" (Burd, S., 2004).

Council for Higher Education Accreditation Publications and Reports

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation has been, for the past 10 years, the spokesperson for higher education accreditation in the United States. According to their website, their purposes are Advocacy, Service and Recognition. Under Advocacy, they state that they are the "…Primary national voice for voluntary accreditation and quality assurance to U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Education, [the] Primary national voice for voluntary accreditation to the general public, opinion leaders, students, and families, [and the] Representative of U.S. accreditation community to international audiences" (CHEA website, *About CHEA*, CHEA-at-a-Glance). CHEA has taken an understandably strong position favoring accreditation over the past years, but that, after all, has been their stated function. More importantly, according to the CHEA website, they are a 3000 member organization of recognition. "Recognition is the scrutiny and certification of the quality of regional, faith-based, private career and programmatic accrediting organizations. CHEA is the only non-governmental higher education organization

that undertakes this scrutiny" (CHEA website, *About CHEA*, CHEA-at-a-Glance). Thus, you can see that CHEA (as does the United States Government) confers recognition on its member accrediting agencies. Additionally, "CHEA is a vigorous *advocate for accreditation* through its government relations function, representing to the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and the states the interests of member institutions in matters related to self-regulation, accreditation and quality assurance" (CHEA website, *About CHEA*, Serving Member Institutions). Based upon these credentials, CHEA is a logical choice to use for developing information relative to accreditation, its functions, its problems, and its future.

This literature search of CHEA will start with its most current publications, and then work backward in time. With the publication of the report from The Commission on the Future of Higher Education (The Spellings Commission), the two most recent CHEA publications have been generated specifically as responses to the final and to interim reports generated by the Spellings Commission, and they directly relate to the what CHEA sees in the future of accreditation. These publications are not authored; one of the more recent (from their news and commentary publication *Inside Accreditation with the President of CHEA*) addresses to the presidents and chancellors of member institutions the issues of transparency and possible nationalization. It decries using a single set of national standards because of the many differences in the missions and the make-up of the varied institutions of higher learning in our country. It concludes with the following two paragraphs which promote CHEA's vision of the future of accreditation:

> "Higher education is a vital and incredibly important social institution. It is time, once again, to reassert the value of both higher education and accreditation to students and society. We need to remind the public that our enterprise is built on a powerful

vision of intellectual development in a democratic society, education for life as well as work and a commitment to general education that includes education for civic responsibility and citizenship. Accreditation is a core element of this vision, supporting the institutional autonomy and academic freedom essential to its realization"

"Higher education and accreditation may not be able to do anything to halt the increasing nationalization of expectations of institutions in our society. We can, however, play a powerful role in shaping this nationalization as it applies to our institutions and programs. What is at issue here is our attitude: a recognition of our obligation to those who support our vital service. We must not stand on the idea that we are so different from everything else in the society that we cannot be nationally scrutinized and, even at times, measured. We recognize our obligations—in our own terms—by reaffirming the value of our enterprise, assuring that institutional mission and context drive judgment about indicators of successful performance and making this information readily available" (*Inside Accreditation*, Volume 3, Number 1, January 11, 2007)

There appears to be a tone of resignation in the final paragraph regarding the nationalization of accreditation. It is easy when looking back, over the past few years, to see the effects and results of political decisions that are made concerning educational issues. The fear of many in academia is that the development of a national form of accreditation will lead to its federalization, which would thrust it into the political arena. Judith Eaton, the president of CHEA, expressed one position on the issue of politics when she wrote: "Finally, public interest and need are served by the other roles of accreditation that are discussed above. Keeping higher education strong through accreditation's attention to quality, commitment to academic values,

and suitable distance from the political realm all contribute to the viable higher education enterprise that students, government, and the public seek and deserve" (Eaton, J., 2003).

One other un-authored publication (*Accreditation and Accountability: A Special Report*) was also prepared as a response to Spellings Commission. It is a CHEA Occasional Paper that was posted to the CHEA website in December, 2006. In the introductory letter to colleagues, the president of CHEA, Judith Eaton, says: "A good deal of attention has been paid to accreditation and issues of accountability during the past year. … The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has published 13 papers, advisories, and commentaries on outcomes, performance and public information during the past five years. This document is a distillation of CHEA's work, summarizing key recommendations, ideas and effective practices for accrediting organizations working with institutions and programs" (Eaton, J., 2006). Among the points brought out in this report are the following:

"The legitimacy of accreditation as a protector of academic quality in higher education is increasingly challenged in the absence of quality review that pays significant attention to outcomes. Information about student learning outcomes is important to accrediting organizations because the expectation that accreditors will provide this information is growing among important constituents, including those who recognize these organizations" (Accreditation and Accountability: A Special Report, p. 1).

"For institutions and programs, information about student learning outcomes is central to any claim of intellectual authority that they may offer. For faculty, the primary value of evidence of student learning is to aid in the improvement of teaching and learning. … Part of the task of accreditation is to help institutions, programs and faculty substantiate their claims to quality" (Accreditation and Accountability: A Special Report, p. 1).

It can be seen from the above that CHEA, over the past 5 years, has been advocating a change in the accreditation process. This change, while not necessarily advocating a move away from "inputs", is at least a move toward being able to measure "outputs". Has this change been accepted and adopted by all of CHEA's members? Without a study of the practices of each of the member accrediting bodies, it would be hard to make a definitive statement. However, one possible indication of this move toward measuring "outputs" can be seen in this next source, taken from an Occasional Paper written in 2001 (*Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure*) prepared in 2001 by Peter T. Ewell. In the introductory pages to this paper, the author acknowledges that concern for what and how much students were learning in our institutions of higher learning dates back to the middle of the 1980's. The author goes on to cite two of the 6 regional accrediting organizations (namely, SACS and the North Central Association) for taking early action in a move toward assessing actual learning: SACS for adopting "institutional effectiveness" language in 1986 and North Central for requiring assessment plans that focused on providing evidence of student learning. Bear in mind, however, that these changes he referenced took place over 20 years ago, and this report was prepared in 2001. Additionally, the following quotation refers to the fact that the responses were themselves different and moving at their own speeds.

"Accrediting organizations have thus not been idle in the face of escalating needs to demonstrate what college students know and can do. But they have responded in quite different ways and have moved at different speeds to implement new approaches. Furthermore, evidence is strong that institutions and programs remain only marginally engaged. Few have progressed beyond superficial engagement with "assessment," though accrediting organizations have been asking them to do so for years. Meanwhile, the demands for accountability and the changes in

instructional delivery that originally stimulated national concern about student learning outcomes are unabated" (Ewell, P., 2001).

These references clearly present two significant points. The first is that change, however it is started, and by whomever it is initiated, and regardless of the good reasons behind the movement, is simply not embraced and championed in the same way by all, nor is it even implemented on a wide scale by those who recognize its necessity. What we see in the selections above has taken years to come about, and then only after it was very nearly forced upon academia. Accreditors, along with many others in education, reacted with shock and horror when they first realized that Congress was considering requiring full disclosure and allowing the States to assume accreditation functions. The other point is that only now, after what amounts to years of pressure from outside groups, have accreditors and their representative organizations accepted these changing concepts associated with student learning and more transparency. They have begun to include issues of accountability and student learning in their publications and manuals. They have also reacted to the transparency issues by taking the positive actions of providing information and documentation, and facilitating its retrieval on their websites.

ED.gov (Accreditation)

On the ED.gov website, you can select "accreditation" under quick-search, and this takes you to the main page on which you can find just about anything you would want to read about that subject. On that page you find the following: "The **U.S. Department of Education** does not accredit educational institutions and/or programs. However, the Secretary of Education is required by law to publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies that the Secretary determines to be reliable authorities as to the quality of education or training provided by the institutions of higher education and the higher education programs they accredit" (*Overview of*

Accreditation, ED.gov.). On this page you can also find a link to "Accreditation in the U. S." which takes you to a page that gives you a brief but thorough background on the official position of accreditation and its functions. Among the nine functions listed for accreditation is the following: "#9**.** Providing one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for Federal assistance" (*Some Functions of Accreditation*, ED.gov). This, then, is the basis for the real power of accreditation: the threat of loss of federal funding if an institution loses its accreditation. Since the Department of Education does not itself grant accreditation, this function is left up to the regional and professional accreditation organizations. Due to this fact—that accreditation carries such weight in the form of an implied threat to federal funding—many who are critical of the regional accreditation organizations want to have this power removed from them by eliminating this function.

This site provides access to enormous amounts of material, so it was necessary to narrow the focus to current accreditation issues. From this site, it was possible to access data relating to the Secretary of Education's Commission on The Future of Higher Education. This commission and its activities generated information and reports that proved to be invaluable in their contribution to this study: the final draft of the Spelling's Commission's report, the pre-publication report, four interim Commission Reports, fifteen Issue Papers, and eight Other Reports of Interest. It is also possible to link to public comments that were made at various meetings and forums that were held during the course of the Spellings Commission's activities.

Journals

There are hundreds of journals available electronically through college and university libraries. This search was limited to those journals which focus on issues dealing with education,

higher education, evaluation, and learning. There are no journals specifically directed toward accreditation and its issues.

The real benefits of bringing into this discussion the views of persons who write for educational journals or other types of education-related publications is that it will, in essence, broaden the perspective of this paper when discussing the needs for change and or reform of the accreditation system. Furthermore, the authors of some of these commentaries have addressed the added issues and implications that may come about as a result of there being any changes made in the system. Another point that can be made is that most of these pieces help to provide a different perspective on the issues surrounding accreditation, accountability, and transparency. They are not written from a critical perspective, nor are they written from a defensive standpoint. Because they are, for the most part, written by persons with nothing to lose or to gain, they have a more detached approach and quality about them. This is not an implication that the other pieces of literature used thus far have not been reasonable in their approach, but some have come from sources that conceivably have a deep stake in the eventual outcomes. The position taken here is to bring them in and quote them, and allow the readers be the judge.

David E. Leveille, a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California, Berkeley, surely brings convincing yet unbiased tone to the on-going "battle" between elected legislative officials and institutional administrators: "Mention the term 'accountability' as applied to higher education and a number of negative images immediately arise. State legislators see colleges and universities as secretive, over reactive, and quick to label any external imposition an attack on academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Conversely, campuses view public officials as uninformed and unrealistic. State officials are seen as too impulsive about intervening in their eagerness to demonstrate to taxpayers that only their timely

intervention can assure quality and contain skyrocketing tuitions" (Leveille, D., 2005). What we see in this passage is confirmation of the fact that we have a situation that is already highly-charged—one in which each side already has an axe to grind. With that in mind we need, in my opinion, to bring about some resolution to this "distrust" of accreditation. This study may perhaps provide one possible path.

Leveille goes on to bring out a need to balance the institution's need for some amount of autonomy with society's need for additional accountability in the accreditation processes: "The need to safeguard and recognize the important value and principle of academic freedom in the classroom and in research and scholarly writing argues strongly for substantial autonomy of higher education. Yet, amidst increasing calls for accountability, the states and higher education must seek a balance between autonomy and accountability. Absent the achievement of balance, higher education will find itself dealing with the increased efforts undertaken by external bodies and political interests, including intrusive behavior, micromanagement, and bureaucratic substitution for professional judgment" (Leveille, D., 2005).

An article, written by two British professors, and dealing with the differences and similarities between U. S. Accreditation and U. K. Audit, offered an interesting perspective. The authors point out another of what they see as a problem for accreditation as it exists in this country: "Perhaps most importantly, while neither process looks closely at teaching quality, audit does focus on academic standards; accreditation is still very largely preoccupied with inputs, in spite of several decades of criticism by those in the USA who favour [sic—British spelling] output-based measures (Clark and Brown, 2005). A consideration of academic standards plays virtually no part in American accreditation, and none of the six regional accrediting commissions is able (or even feels itself under an obligation) to ensure comparability of academic standards –

even at the threshold level – as between each of the institutions it accredits" (Alderman, G., and Brown, R., 2005). Perhaps the utilization of a "logic model approach" to the design, communication, and implementation of accreditation processes would help to establish more comparability between the six regional accreditation organizations.

Another European article further develops this theme of quality assurance, autonomy, and standardization. Apparently the issues are not unique to us here in the United States. While some countries use an "audit"/ governmental approach, some are using or attempting to implement an approach similar to our accreditation. "However, systematic quality assurance, in both national and international contexts, has raised the question of to what extent higher education institutions may become more standardized at the expense of institutional diversity and development. The possible standardization of higher education implies a dilemma between the need to establish a certain threshold level of quality as a response to deregulation and a growing internationalization of the sector and the wish to preserve the uniqueness and diversity of higher education. Balancing these needs is important when developing new accreditation schemes in higher education" (Proitz, Stensaker, and Harvey, 2004). The authors address the same issues that Americans are addressing as a result of dissatisfaction and continuing criticisms. The reference to de-regulation is made because a number of European countries are apparently moving away from governmental control of the approval process and toward a more institution-oriented and controlled process like ours.

The authors go on to address another issue that serves as a primary focus of this study, namely the ability to promote real quality in results while maintaining the individuality and diversity of our higher education institutions. "However, accreditation procedures are usually designed to exercise some control over the sector: they establish whether a programme [sic] or

institution meets specified threshold minimum standards and thus may be warranted as *bona fide*. The standards may be input standards, such as staff profiles, buildings and equipment, library contents and so on, or process standards, such as adequate curricula, teaching contact time and assessment processes, or output standards, such as the academic achievement or professional competence of students at different levels. Output and process standards tend to be only directly assessed, if at all, when a programme [sic] or institution is revalidated or reaccredited. Although slightly misleading, accreditation processes, which essentially check standards and provide an operating legitimacy, are sometimes referred to as producing a 'quality label' for successful candidates. One has to ask whether such labelling [sic] represents a compliance with a predetermined norm or is flexible enough to acknowledge threshold standard achievement in a diverse system" (Proitz, et. al., 2004). Once again, I believe that the results of this study could ultimately produce a logic model that not only promotes valid, dependable accreditations, but also allows for the individuality and diversity of our institutions. As an additional benefit, if the "logic model approach" works, it could be expanded beyond the six regional organizations to encompass the professional accreditation associations.

An article by Jon Wergin in 2005 provides a real sense of the picture with regard to accreditation's position in the continuing controversies over quality assurance, transparency, and improved student learning outcomes. He comments on the changing educational environment, the increasing demands on institutional and faculty time and resources, and the fact that human learning is much more than simply transmitting information: "All of this has left regional accrediting commissions in a tug of war unlike any in their history. Pulling at one end of the rope are pressures to focus more explicitly on student learning outcomes. Accreditation's tradition of peer review—the notion that the best way to assure academic quality is for an institution to be

evaluated by faculty and staff drawn from similar institutions according to a set of comprehensive standards negotiated and agreed to by all—is well suited to an age that relied on inputs and processes" (Wergin, J., 2005b). Here we see yet another reference to accreditation's inability to let go of its older methods. Even though we have the inclusion of references to student learning and outcomes, it still is not a complete transformation.

Wergin continues: "Pulling at the other end of the rope arc the colleges and universities that undergo 'voluntary' accreditation. As commissions work to retrofit their standards and assessment processes to address accountability concerns, they must also maintain adequate ties with their member institutions. A system based on peer review requires these institutions to be willing to go along with needed changes, and demands academic professionals who are willing and able to undertake a different kind of review" (Wergin, 2005b). Accreditation may just find itself trapped between the "rock and a hard place" that lots of us never want to get into: It has to "police" its members…members who have to agree to the changing demands that society is placing on them (through the accreditation process), while at the same time these member institutions have to willingly agree to continue their membership in the organization.

Wergin continues and brings us to the essence of this somewhat insecure position in which accreditation finds itself: "These changes have not come easily. As a result, the long ambivalent relationship between commissions and their member colleges has become even more so as commissions struggle to maintain their dual allegiance. While commission staff may want institutions to sec them as sources of help in improving academic quality, those on campus who are digging through an institutional self-study, trying to understand the latest standards and guidelines, often feel an overwhelming desire to simply get the whole thing over with. A "compliance mentality" ensues, neither party ends up feeling very good about the encounter, and

the potential for accreditation as a major force for the improvement of student learning is lost" (Wergin, 2005).

The net result of this literature search has suggested that accreditation is in an extremely uncomfortable and difficult position. The accrediting organizations are striving to find ways to justify their existence and strengthen their position on the educational playing field. They are attempting to convince legislators, consumer advocates, consumers, and their institutional members of their benefits and value. It is possible that the logic model approach can help to clarify the processes, aid in the communication of the goals and methods important to the successful implementation of the processes, and facilitate the necessary data-gathering and information dissemination activities that the accreditation processes require.

Related Logic Model Literature

The literature indicates that the use of logic models as the basis for developing and communicating the many phases and stages of the accreditation process to visiting teams, on-site teams, stakeholders, and other interested parties, could lead to less confusion, less misinformation, less fear and misunderstanding, and a clearer vision of what should be the ultimate goal of every accreditation or accountability investigation: improved programs and improved results.

What, exactly, is a logic model? What role can, or should, logic play in the accreditation process? Most persons reading this would agree that there is a definite place for logic within the processes and activities being examined in this study. Logic implies a reason, a rationale, and a consistency that most persons would simply inherently expect to find in accreditation. There are fewer persons still, regardless of their acceptance, who would feel competent to justify its

existence, and even fewer who could discuss their conception of a logic model. The literature sheds some light on this subject.

The concept of Logic Models is not new. Basically and simply, a logic model is a graph of a program or an operation. According to the Rand Corporation:

> A logic model typically offers a simplified visual representation of the path of a program's operations, starting with inputs and then progressing to the program's activities, its outputs, its customers, and its intended outcomes. The model may also link the program's operations, what the program actually does either alone or with others to fulfill its mission, to its strategy, which we define as the goals, management objectives, and performance measures that support the program's mission. Operations include resources, actors, and events, whereas strategy speaks of intentions (Greenfield, V. A., Williams, V. L., and Eiseman, E., 2006).

One of the simplest yet most complete descriptions found for a logic model is contained in an article entitled: *Everything You Wanted To Know About Logic Models But Were Afraid to Ask*:

> Logic models are typically diagrams, flow sheets, or some other type of visual schematic that conveys relationships between contextual factors and programmatic inputs, processes, and outcomes. Logic models can come in all shapes and sizes: boxes with connecting lines that are read from left to right (or top to bottom); circular loops with arrows going in or out; or other visual metaphors and devices. What these schemata have in common are they attempt to show the links in a chain of reasoning about 'what causes what,' in relationship to the desired outcome or goal. The desired outcome or goal is usually shown as the last link in the model (Schmitz & Parsons, 1999).

According to the W K Kellogg Foundation, which has published a very extensive logic model handbook, and is a great proponent of using logic models, there are three basic logic model approaches. Each of these has a particular viewpoint or goal/objective, and therefore a particular use. In order to keep the focus of this discussion on the differences between the three approaches, and not to confuse the issue by including details and examples of each of the categories, I am illustrating each model as a simple strait line chart reading from left to right. Arrows (→) could have been used instead of boxes for each major heading to indicate the relationship that each heading bears to the next item from left to right. The emphasized category/categories of each model type are indicated in **bold** text. This is not intended to be a definitive discussion of the advantages or disadvantages of each model type. It is included here simply to establish the basic components of each of the three models, and to provide a simple explanation of the reason why each model fits an appropriate use. It is important to state here that a logic model does not have to assume the shape of a straight line. The logic model could be triangular, circular, or have any geometric shape. The line approach is being illustrated here because it is simple and direct, and, if necessary, each of the three model types can be easily distinguished from the other two by simply lining them up directly above or under each other.

(1.) **Theory Approach Logic Model**

This approach emphasizes the theory of change that has influenced the design and plan for the particular program under review. By emphasizing the underlying theory, (i.e., by detailing the selected theory and selecting and illustrating the key components of that theory) it provides a background of the reasons why the program exists and any ideas that the program may be based on. In the next column, any available program resources and available inputs would be listed, followed by a column listing the suggested program activities/strategies to be

applied utilizing that resource or activity. Each of these activities would then be linked directly to the problem/issue addressed by this step of the program. In listing the expected impact that each of the listed activities and resources should address, an implied theoretical explanation of how the program would work and why it should work would be provided. This theory approach is, according to the Kellogg Foundation, most useful during the planning and design phases of the program. The simplified theory approach would look like this:

Theory/ Assumptions/ Reasons	Resources/ Inputs	Activities/ Solution Strategies	Outputs/ Issues Addressed	Short and Long Term Outcomes	Impact
(Assumptions)	*(Resources)*	*(Activities)*	*(Issues)*	*(Short/Long)*	*(Impact)*

(2.) **Outcomes Approach Logic Model**

This model is used during the early, initial planning phase of a program. While assumptions based upon some underlying theory are made, they are not the focus of this model. Instead this model attempts to link various and necessary resources and inputs available to the program with the corresponding activity or activities. Again, even though the issues addressed are listed and linked, they are not the focus of this model. Instead, the activities are more directly associated with the expected, desired overall results or impact. In establishing these links, the assumption is that the result would be an effective and workable program. Outcomes are the focus here, and since the outcomes do not necessarily occur immediately, and are not necessarily measurable immediately at the conclusion of the activities, the outcomes in question are usually divided into short term incomes, long term incomes, and the ultimate, desired impact. Because this model emphasized the link between activities and resources and the expected

results, this model would be the most useful of the three for addressing the future evaluation of the program and reporting and judging the ultimate results of the program.

Assumptions	**Resources/ Inputs**	**Activities**	Outputs/ Issues	**Short Term Outcomes (1 – 3 yrs)**	**Long Term Outcomes (4 – 6 yrs)**	**Impact (7 – 10 yrs)**
(Assumptions)	*(Resources)*	*(Activities)*	*(Issue)s*	*(Short)*	*(Long)*	*(Impact)*

(3.) **Activities Approach Logic Model**

This model pays the most attention to the implementation process. This model would include a very specific, detailed listing of the planned activities of the program. Again, assumptions are made, and resources and inputs are linked, but the focus here is to link the activities and resources with the detailed activities and steps necessary to implement the program. By detailing the activities linking them with each corresponding implementation step, this model would be used to map the processes and success associated with implementing the program in an effective manner. This model is used to provide management and decision makers with information regarding the process of program implementation.

Assumptions	Resources/ Inputs	**Activities/ Detailed Steps**	**Outputs/ Program Implementation**	Short and Long Term Outcomes	Impact
(Assumptions)	*(Resources)*	*(Activities)*	*(Issues)*	*(Short/Long)*	*(Impact)*

At this point it is appropriate to incorporate a reference to the effect that underlying logic models can exert on the evaluation/accreditation process. This information was contained in a research study conducted by Dr Marina A. Adler, who was conducting a study of the coordination of various non-related domestic-violence services in metropolitan Baltimore. In her

introduction, she suggests that each of the individual service's model can lead to a different program emphasis. Her data, collected from the variety of agencies participating in the coordination study lead her to state: "The overall goals of the various agencies are similar, but the activities of the agencies in the CCR [coordinated community response]… are guided by varying intervention models, leading to different priorities…" (Adler, 2002). In her paper, she "…argues for a holistic, theory-based evaluation approach to examine the entire system" (Adler, 2002). While she is emphasizing the theory approach to logic modeling, this still illustrates the importance and the effect that the underlying logic model can have on the evaluation results when applying one model to an entire system, as is done by the regional accreditation agencies. She also emphasizes the role that models can play in the ultimate evaluation process for a program: "Throughout the modeling process various methodological options for a future evaluation presented themselves" (Adler, 2002). She includes the following thoughts about the modeling process: "Theoretical modeling is a dynamic process and evaluation planning benefits from a participatory approach … [which will] facilitate cooperation at later stages in the evaluation process" (Adler, 2002).

As important as it is to understand what a logic model is, it is also very important to be clear about what a logic model is not. While the existence of a logic model does pave the way to having a successful program, it does not in any way guarantee a more successful program, and it especially does not guarantee more effective evaluations. The logic model is a starting point from which to begin the design of the evaluation of the particular program or institution in question. In a PowerPoint presentation in 2005, Ellen Taylor-Powell made the following points: "A logic model is not a Theory, a Reality, or an Evaluation Method or Model" (Ellen Taylor-Powell, 2005). In the absence of any of her clarifying comments, but in an effort to elaborate on

these three points, I am inserting my own thoughts. Most of the following comments are based on a common-sense, logical approach to an explanation of each point.

- "The logic model is not a theory" (Taylor-Powell, 2005). The underlying theory/theories is/are what drive(s) the development of the program, according to the Kellogg Foundation. One begins with the theory and uses that theory as the basis for making the assumptions that lead directly to the activities that are included in the proposed model. Since there can be many theories and variations of accepted theories (just look at the sheer number of theories having to do with education, training, testing, justifying, or whatever activity or process you may be trying to examine), it would seem to me that we would be putting the cart before the horse, so to speak, if we tried to use the model as the theory. Also, each theory an individual or an institution uses and accepts would lead to another, perhaps vitally different, logic model. The underlying theory drives the model, and not vice versa.
- "The logic model is not reality" (Taylor-Powell, 2005). The model represents the ideal situation. In the model everything goes as planned. All outcomes are achieved; at the very least, the effective processes have been put into place and the activities supporting them are put into motion and being carried out. Since even the best and most perfectly developed plans depend upon the actions of individuals, and since the environment surrounding the implementation of even the perfect plan or program can change at any point in time, it would be totally unrealistic to assume that the reality and the model would be one and the same. If they were, there would be no reason to even perform the evaluation, because everything would have been implemented and carried out perfectly—

which is very seldom the case. The entire point of having an evaluation process is to determine where the reality differs from the model.

- "The Logic Model is not an evaluation model or method" (Taylor-Powell, 2005). In a recent journal article, Michael Scriven describes approximately 23 to 25 evaluation models that he recognizes. The logic model does not dictate any prescribed method for evaluating, nor does it imply any kind of evaluation model. In some cases, the evaluation design and the methods used for collecting data and justifying one's results may depend upon the input of many persons, stakeholders included. If one is looking for successful theories, outcomes, or activities, the existence of a logic model does help to ensure that those appropriate theories, outcomes, or activities are actually included in the design and the data collection phases of the evaluation activities. In my opinion, perhaps the most important role that an underlying logic model can play in the evaluation process is to help ensure that the appropriate goals, objectives, or desired outcomes of the program under examination are, indeed, the ones that the evaluation is seeking to illuminate or elucidate.

Logic models, other than being categorized as one of the previous three basic types, do not have to fit into any preconceived format. As stated previously, they can be constructed to look like diagrams, flow charts, or virtually any kind of schematic. The main purpose of a logic model is to tie together and illustrate the relationships that are operating, whether directly visible, or in a more behind the scenes manner, in a program or an operation that is being evaluated or studied…regardless of the reason for the study.

"Ideally, program theory guides an evaluation by identifying key program elements and articulating how these elements are expected to relate to each other. Data collection plans are then made within the framework in order to measure the extent and nature of each element's

occurrence. Once collected, the data are analyzed within the framework" (Cooksy, Gill & Kelly, 2001). Based upon the simplicity of this approach, one might think that the logic model perspective would catch on instantly and become widely recognized as a valid framework from which to design and implement a successful program or institutional evaluation. The opposite is actually the case. Further examination of the Cooksy, Gill & Kelly study informs us that: "Despite its potential as an integrative framework, the use of program theory as a framework for mixed-method evaluations is not well-documented…, and program theory in general 'appears to be having only marginal influence on evaluation practice' [Weiss, 1997, p. 501]" (Cooksy et al, 2001). The literature reveals a conundrum: An approach that can be utilized to clarify positions and facilitate the communication of the goals, aims, and intended objectives of the accreditation is not being used. This is an indication that perhaps more study could be initiated in this area.

The literature does not reveal a clear history of logic models or of the activity of logic modeling. Logic Models appear to have entered the literature in discussions approximately twenty five years ago. It is difficult to find an exact, chronological time line, as there is no published history of any sort. The concept itself is probably not a new one, as there have always been proponents of using models—whether or not referred to as logic models—in the planning and the developing of plans and programs. One logic-model study, reported by Cooksey et. al., contains as much of a history of logic models as there is to be found. This is not presented here as a definitive history. It does, though, present a clear background of the development of logic model theory. It is included here in its entirety, including references to the sources which they quoted:

> Before the term "program theory" became popular, evaluators were recommending models of evaluation that involved going beyond the simple identification of cause and

effect constructs to the articulation of what we would now call program theory. For example, Stake (1967) presented a model that calls for describing the intended antecedents (whatever needs to be in place before a program is operational), transactions (activities and outputs), and outcomes of a program. Then data on the program in operation are compared to what was intended and to what the standards are for that kind of program. Stufflebeam's (1971) CIPP model is similar to Stake's in its content (CIPP stands for Context-Inputs-Processes-Products) and was designed to encourage a systems approach to evaluation. According to Stufflebeam (1983), the CIPP model does not necessarily lead to the formulation of hypotheses, but it does "provide a rich array of background data against which to interpret and understand outcomes" (p. 128). Another early proponent of program theory, Weiss (1972) recommended using path diagrams to model the sequence of steps between a program's intervention and the desired outcomes. This kind of causal model helps the evaluator identify the variables to include in the evaluation, discover where in the chain of events the sequence breaks down, and stay attuned to changes in program implementation that may affect the pattern depicted in the model (Weiss, 1972).

Despite this rich tradition of approaches to articulating patterns of relationships, evaluation continued to be dominated by models based on methodological choices instead of on program design (Chen & Rossi, 1980). Because evaluations based on these models tended to provide little evidence of program effectiveness, Chen and Rossi (1980, 1983) began advocating what they called "theory-driven evaluation." They (1980) argued that theory-driven evaluations would be more likely than methods-driven evaluations to discover program effects on the grounds that theory-driven evaluations would identify

and examine larger set potential program outcomes. The longer list of program outcomes would be theory-based, drawn from existing social science theory and the implicit program models of program stakeholders. Developing the theory-driven approach further, Chen (1990) articulated two major types of theory-driven evaluation. The first, normative evaluation, compares a prescriptive theory of what the program should be to data on the program in operation in order to discover any inconsistencies between the two. In contrast, causative evaluation focuses on the causal relationships underlying a program in order to assess program impact and understand the causal mechanisms associated with program effects.

One of the distinguishing features of theory-driven evaluation is that it explicitly includes a connection to social science theory. However, other writings about program theory have argued that social science theory is generally not relevant to program stakeholders. For example, in Patton's (1997) user-focused approach, the "evaluator's task is to facilitate intended users, including program personnel, in articulating their operating theory," also known as the "espoused theory of action" (p. 221, 223). The espoused theory is then tested by comparison to program reality, the 'theory-in-use' (Cooksy, et al, 2001).

The literature does not reveal any direct rejection of the use of logic models for evaluation purposes. There are, though, differing views regarding the value of using the logic model approach to evaluation planning and implementation. Cooksy, et al, (2001) list what they consider to be disadvantages of logic models. One of the disadvantages mentioned is the cost involved with discovering and formulating the theories involved in a program, and then subsequently developing the actual model itself. This would presumably be a disadvantage that

arises in situations where the logic model did not precede the development of the program's goals and activities. If the program under review is already based upon a clearly communicated model, that model would not only be obvious, but its existence would also eliminate having to complete this step. There is also the potential problem caused by misuse of the program's underlying theory(ies). This situation presumably would arise when the program's operators allow the model to rigidly dictate the program's operation, and thus limit the program in its response to any new information (Cooksy, et. al., 2001). In addition, the program's evaluators could also apply the model inflexibly, and use direct compliance with the model as a measure of the program's quality. In so doing, the evaluators could miss or ignore any program effects that are not directly related to program theory (Cooksy et. al., 2001).

Cooksy et al (2001) then go on to list and discuss alternatives to using logic models in planning and implementing program evaluations. These alternatives include path diagrams, program templates, concept maps, and narrative. Their narrative on these alternatives is included here:

> Compared to the options, logic models are unique in communicating the relationship of program resources and operations to outcomes in a simple picture. Path diagrams share the simplicity of logic models, but do not include the operational detail that a logic model has. In addition, they usually start with program activities or outputs, rather than with antecedent conditions. Without outlining expected resources and support activities, path diagrams are likely to be less useful than logic models when diagnosing why a program does not have the intended effects. Like logic models and path diagrams, program templates distill detailed descriptions of the assumptions underlying a program into a format that is easy to follow, however they emphasize program activities instead of the

connections between resources, activities, and outcomes. Similarly, concept maps tend to be limited to a single step in the sequence of resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Finally, textual descriptions can be more complete than charts, diagrams, or matrices, but written presentations of program theory are not consistent in their content and therefore are not useful as a generally recommended framework (Cooksy et. al., 2001).

In the handbook, *Using Logic Models for Strategic Planning and Evaluation*, The Rand Corporation presents additional information relative to the advantages of using a logic model:

> A primary strength of the logic model is its capacity to serve multiple purposes. Here and in the following chapters, we base our approach to strategic planning and evaluation on three interrelated roles of the logic model:
>
> First, it can serve as a communication device. It can provide internal and external audiences, including program partners, customers, evaluators, and other interested parties, with a clear image or map of the program's operations and intent. The model can also be used to clearly identify program boundaries and delineate responsibilities, thereby clarifying the meaning of "impact" as it relates to the program. As such, a logic model can aid in program planning and evaluation.
>
> Second, it can serve as a foundation for developing strategic plans, including goals and measures. More specifically, it can be used to "walk back" from a program's mission to formulate strategic goals, intermediate goals, annual goals, and management objectives, and to craft a set of closely corresponding or aligned long-term, intermediate, annual, and management measures that can be used to gauge progress and results.

> Third, having developed a strategic plan with goals and measures, it can provide a tool that facilitates the selection and effective use of evidence to demonstrate a program's progress or results. In summary, a well-aligned logic model can serve as a means for program communication, strategy development, and evaluation (Greenfield, Williams, and Eiseman, 2006).

One final word seems in order here concerning how much information to attempt to include in a logic model. The Rand Handbook suggests starting with a logic model template, which they illustrate with a very elaborate template that is more complex than the three conceptual models presented by the Kellogg Foundation. The logic model template can then be made more or less elaborate in order to better fit the program or operation under consideration. It could perhaps be argued based on this that one should use a balanced approach in constructing the model. The goal of the model for the program referred to in the following quotation seems to be twofold—the first being program representation, and the second being strategy development. Their points are well taken, though, relative to the amount of information one should attempt to include in any logic model, and my attempt in this investigation will be to keep the model as simple as possible:

> …we note that there is a fine line between too little and too much information. One aim of a logic model is to provide a simplified representation of a program, but as a tool for strategy development, it must also provide sufficient information to establish appropriate goals and measures. In our efforts to address major deviations from the template (e.g., the roles of partners and interdependencies), we ran the risk of adding cumbersome and potentially confusing complexity. Nevertheless, we view these deviations as important aspects of the NCIPC program, having significant implications for developing a strategy

and setting goals and measures. On this basis, they merit inclusion (Greenfield, Williams, and Eiseman, 2006).

The literature emphasizes that if the model is to be as flexible, and subsequently as useful, as possible, the amount of information it contains should be kept to the necessity of its purpose. The literature supports the position that a logic model can be useful for communicating, planning, decision making, and program evaluation. Any attempt at developing an accreditation logic model should have the end use as it focus. When developed, it should be flexible enough to be applied by various constituents and in various environments. The use of an accreditation logic model should result in accreditations that are both helpful and central to an institution's continued growth and to its success in helping its students to learn and develop.

In closing this discussion of accreditation and logic model literature, some observations are appropriate. The literature relative to logic models has come from publications unrelated to education and accreditation. The literature, to a great extent, was published by charitable foundations, grant funding organizations, and community service organizations. The combination of logic modeling and accreditation is entering new ground. Logic models have been around for a long time; people seem to be aware of them from an operational but not a developmental standpoint; and, very few organizations approach the design of a program and its evaluation by starting with an underlying logic model.

This literature review serves to underline the value of and the potential importance of this study. Accreditation needs to make changes. Accreditors want to maintain their roles within higher education. Accreditors want to establish their value and worth in today's environment. If a plan of accreditation were based on an underlying logic model, if the model were designed first and followed by the design of the accreditation, or if the communication and application of

existing accreditation processes were based upon their underlying logic models, it is possible to significantly improve the results achieved. The intent of this study is to facilitate the achievement of the desired accreditation results.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Methodology Used to Develop the Logic Models

The fundamental goal of this study was to facilitate improvement in the application of the processes of accreditation. In personal discussions with persons having the advantage of considerable amounts of prior experience in the accreditation process, and from some limited personal experience, it appears generally accepted that there are some information and training voids in the accreditation processes relative to design, communication, and application. From its conceptual beginnings and through its subsequent development into a proposed study, the purpose of this research has been to find some way of illuminating and clarifying the accreditation process, thus contributing to a more effective process overall.

This investigation has gone through a number of design phases. In the first phase, an attempt was made to search and examine available historical documentation that might illuminate the development of the various regional accreditation processes over time. As previously noted, there are very few, if any, documents of this type readily available. For example, due to storage considerations, SACS does not retain copies of older handbooks and manuals on the premises when they are updated and revised. They are boxed and housed in an off-site storage facility. Another phase attempted to conduct interviews of persons involved in the development of the various accreditation processes. After the passage of any amounts of time, it proved to be extremely difficult to compile and access a sufficient representative group of persons who could provide some insight into the development processes. The third phase was directed toward the discovery of any acknowledged underlying logic model associated with the regional accreditation processes of one regional association. If there were any, it should be

possible to find literature references to them along with discussions of their function and value. As previously stated, this was not the case. There are simply no literature citations to be found that linked accreditation and its processes to logic modeling. For these reasons, it was deemed necessary to employ a unique methodology for the next phase. The decision was made to conduct a pilot study. This pilot was essentially conducted to determine the possibility of achieving any meaningful results relative to the use of logic models in the accreditation process.

For this fourth phase, the pilot study was designed and conducted using only one of the regional accreditation associations. For comparison purposes, one State Board of Higher Education would be selected from the member states of that regional association. This approach, after a complete and thorough examination and analysis, proved to be impractical. After conducting a logic model study of the program approval process in the state of Louisiana, it was determined that there was not sufficient similarity between program approval and institutional accreditation to justify continuing to follow that particular design framework. Moreover, there are fifty states, each with varying degrees of authority, and diverse contractual powers granted by their legislatures. It would therefore not be promising to attempt the construction of one meaningful state logic model for comparison with an accreditation logic model. Due to this, another design approach was selected. This fifth phase proved to be one that showed promise.

This phase was a pilot study based upon SACS documents and additional accreditation documents that were related to but not prepared by SACS. While searching the links to the various pieces of documentation on the SACS website, it was observed that some of the documents were prepared by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. This council is composed of members from the regional accreditation organizations, and apparently its function is to speak with one voice on matters that affect all of the regional accreditation organizations.

The activities of the Council appear to be limited to this one function. According to Jon Wergin, "An additional set of principles for accreditation practice was produced as the result of a project undertaken by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC). Funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, CRAC members—the seven (sic) regional accrediting commissions came together and developed a set of 'Principles for Good Practices' in the assessment of student learning at the institutional level" (Wergin, 2005a).

According to Wergin, these principles are important because they are "… intended to under gird accreditation practice across all regions of the country…, they affirm several important points: the centrality of student learning to the accreditation function, an acknowledgment that learning goals must relate to institutional mission and to the certificate or degree awarded, the need for multiple forms of evidence if we are to engage in purposeful dialogue about learning, and the importance of regional accreditation as an agent for improving student learning on member campuses" (Wergin, 2005a). Because the principles in these documents are, by design, intended to be a foundation of accreditation practices, and also because these principles should apply to all of the regional accreditation organizations, it was decided to include these documents in the study and use them for comparison purposes.

When completed, the final results of the pilot study were presented to the committee for their inspection and approval. Upon receiving the authorization to continue, it was then determined the next step would be to conduct a formal logic model study based on two of the six regional accreditation organizations. For inclusion in this study, the committee selected the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools—hereafter referred to in this paper as SACS—and the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools—hereafter referred to in this paper as North Central.

Before beginning the discussion of steps applied in the previous study and proposed for this study, it is important to discuss the conceptual levels upon which this analysis was based. The development of an abstract logic model must be based upon two distinct levels or planes of thinking. The first plane is composed of fundamental, lower order specifics based upon straightforward facts, numbers and figures. This level would require the use of skills comprising the first three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy—namely knowledge, comprehension, and application. In this level, the actual words used and the number of times they are used will supply a concrete, mathematical basis for their importance, and thus for their inclusion in the model. The second plane calls for the inclusion of higher level, conceptual thinking. In order to construct a meaningful model that communicates the relationships, the interactions, and the underlying functional order between the components of the model, it is necessary to make use of higher level thought processes—especially those employing intangible, conceptualized interpretations of the words as they are used in the documents under review. This level would necessitate the use of skills described in the next three levels of Bloom's taxonomy—namely analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Since the pilot study involved only one regional accreditation organization, namely SACS, no references will be made to North Central until further on in this chapter, when this methodology is expanded to include the study approved by the committee.

This discussion of methodology begins by incorporating some essential background information relative to the development and implementation of a logic model. As developed in Chapter Two, a logic model essentially takes one of three basic forms. The Theory Approach, which emphasizes influential theories of change, is most applicable to the planning and design phases of program development. The Outcomes Approach, which links resources and inputs to

activities with a focus on eventual outcomes, is most applicable when addressing future evaluations. The Activities Approach, which lists specific, planned activities of the program, is most applicable when addressing program implementation. Because of the specificity of the Outcomes Approach to future accreditation activities, the Outcomes Approach Logic Model was chosen as a framework for developing the SACS logic model.

The prevailing thought (as developed in the Theoretical Logic Model Support/Framework section of Chapter One) among persons who have had some experience with developing and using logic models is that the modeling activities should come first, before the program's details, activities, and methods of evaluation (accreditation) are decided upon. This would enable the derivation of the maximum benefit from the logic model development process. Additionally, logic model theory states that it is best to have the input of as many of the involved stakeholders as possible during the development process. This order of events assures a broad base of support, and an accompanying concurrence on the part of a majority of stakeholders. It is admittedly more difficult to construct a logic model for a plan or a program—in this case, the accreditation process—that is already in existence. This is owing to the fact that there is an inherent lack of knowledge of details and information concerning the original development of the program.

There is no justification for believing that it cannot be done. When attempted after the fact, the logic modeling activities could perhaps result in the construction of a logic model that is not precisely identical to one that would have been constructed by the persons originally involved in the development of the regional accreditation process being investigated. However, the hypothesis involved in this study is that a logic model thus constructed should be considerably similar to such an initial model. If a logic model constructed after the fact were to

be significantly different, this would itself be interpreted as an indication of the lack of a valid basis for the original premise of this study. Despite the complications of constructing a logic model subsequent to program development, any successful model thus developed would represent a justification and validation of the logic modeling process.

In this particular instance, and in the absence of any personal background knowledge of the processes by which the SACS Accreditation process came to take its current form, one can only begin with an examination of the finished product, and, using the data thus developed, formulate a logic model. There are no logic modeling textbooks; therefore, the place to start is with all of the available accreditation materials published by the selected organization. A detailed analysis of published materials should provide a basic understanding of the underlying philosophy, the goals and objectives of the particular accreditation process under review, and the steps required steps that an institution undergoing a review should take in order to achieve the desired accreditation.

At this time, it is appropriate to bring out another detail. Until somewhat recently, a study of this kind perhaps would never have even been possible. In the past, there has been a considerable amount of secrecy surrounding accreditation. From personal experience, the dissemination of documents explaining and detailing the processes and methods involved has been rather tightly controlled. Other authors have remarked upon this situation also. "In the USA, in the summer of 2004, there was a determined attempt by Congress to probe the secretive world of accreditation in American H[igher] E[ducation]" (Alderman, G., and Brown, R., 2005). Following this rationale, if there has not been any value placed on having accreditation and its process communicated to and understood by as many persons involved as possible, it would imply that there is a void both within and outside of academia. Prior to the calls in recent years

for more transparency, it was extremely difficult to obtain any information about the inner workings of the accreditation process. Until recently it seems, information was not freely distributed to anyone on the outside. In response to personal requests for materials and handbooks regarding historical data and information about accreditation, there was such a limited amount available that a historical comparison of changes could not even be attempted.

There are probably two reasons that this situation has changed. First and foremost, the current years of bad press that accreditation has been receiving has necessitated that handbooks and manuals be available and accessible to all stakeholders and not just to those involved in its day to day operations. One of the recurring criticisms of accreditation is that it has not been more open and more transparent. It is highly probable that the previous lack in the availability of manuals and handbooks relative to accreditation and its inner workings has greatly enhanced this perception of "secrecy" on the part of many persons.

The second reason is more pragmatic. All of this information is now available electronically. Each of these manuals or handbooks can be read directly from the internet, and, if necessary, they can be reproduced in their entirety by anyone who wishes to do so. Again, this has probably occurred as a direct result of the "pressure" that has been placed upon accreditation over the past few years to be more transparent, and to be more accessible to all parties—educators, politicians, and the public consumers and supporters of higher education in this country.

For this study, each handbook and manual that was examined can be found on the accrediting organization's website and printed from there. To access the material, it is necessary to go to the accrediting organization's homepage. From there, it is necessary to link to its higher education or college/university constituent. In the case of SACS, this is the Commission on

Colleges. Once accessing the appropriate page, the appropriate handbooks and manuals can be accessed. The following books and handbooks are those to be accessed and used for the pilot study:

SACS Documents:

- Principles Of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement
- Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation
- Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement
- Handbook for Review Committees

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions Documents:

- Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: A Guide for Institutions and Evaluators,
- Regional Accreditation and student Learning: Improving Institutional Practice
- Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Preparing Teams for Effective Deliberation.

The methodology discussion from this point will detail the actual steps utilized in the pilot study. It is important to this discussion of methodology that the reader keep in mind the distinction described earlier between fundamental comprehension skills—Bloom's levels one, two, and three—and the higher level skills—Bloom's levels four, five, and six. For this description they will be separated into Fundamental Cognitive Skills Methodology, and Higher Order Cognitive Skills Methodology.

Fundamental Cognitive Skills Methodology

The initial pilot study—of SACS and the Louisiana Board of Regents—was made using documents obtained from the SACS website and from the State of Louisiana Board of Regents website. When that study proved to be impractical, a further search for suitable material followed. Upon further inspection of the documents available at the SACS site, it was determined that they were prepared by two different entities: SACS and the Council of Regional Accrediting Associations. The materials prepared by SACS were specific to the accreditation processes, procedures, and methods required for SACS accreditation or re-accreditation. The documents produced by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions were found to be more generic in their content—they detailed general philosophical and operational topics of accreditation that should apply uniformly to all of the regional accreditation organizations. It was decided to use the two sources of documentation for this next attempt at a pilot study.

Since there were four SACS handbooks and manuals, each one requiring study, dissection, and organization, and three CRAC manuals, the resulting material, of necessity, would somehow require categorizing, counting, organizing, and prioritizing in a manner that would be conducive to illustrating a principle or concept of the underlying logic model. For that reason, this fundamental portion of the pilot study centered on selecting and counting specifically chosen words.

Handbooks and manuals contain sentences that are composed of words that are carefully chosen, crafted, and combined in order to convey a deliberate and intentional thought, principle, or requirement. Even though seemingly similar words could have varying meanings, uses, definitions, and interpretations, it was decided that the search would concentrate on the words that were specific to the vocabulary of accreditation. The first step was to develop a list of

accreditation words that were to be found in journal articles, accreditation textbook selections, and newspaper and magazine articles having to do with accreditation. These words would be specific to the actions, activities, intentions, goals, methods, philosophical perspectives, and outcomes of accreditation.

Over time, and upon recognizing the recurrence of particular words and terms, they would be identified and subsequently added to the list. The final list comprised some 164 accreditation terms and vocabulary words. This total did not include plurals, adjective/adverb forms, noun/verb forms, and other variations or fashions of the root word in question. This list was simply the starting point; there is no intention to imply that this is the definitive listing. Perhaps others would, upon reading the very same sources, add, change, or delete words from the list. The words follow in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Original Key Word Search List

____Access(ibility)	____Comprehension	____Experience	____Merit(s)	____Recipients
____Accommodate	____Comprehensive	____Expert	____Methodology	____Reform(s)
____Accomplishments	____Concept(s)	____Expertise	____Minimal	____Report
____Accountability	____Consequences	____Fairness	____Mission	____Requirement(s)
____Accreditation	____Consumer(s)	____Feasibility	____Model	____Resources
____Achievement(s)	____Content	____Field Test	____Monitor	____Responsibilities
____Activities	____Cost(s)	____Focus	____Motivation(al)	____Responsive(ness)
____Adaptation	____Credibility	____Formative	____Necessitate	____Results
____Adaptability	____Criteria(ion)	____Goal(s)	____Necessity(ies)	____Retention
____Administration	____Curricula	____Good Practice	____Need(s)	____Review(s)
____Advocate	____Data	____Grading	____Needs Assessment	____Rewards
____Affirmation	____Decision(s)	____Impact	____Negative	____Significant(ce)
____Affirmative	____Demonstrate	____Implementation	____Objective(s)	____Standards
____Analysis(ies)	____Development(al)	____Improve	____Outcome(s)	____Strategic Plan(ning)
____Appraisal	____Diagnose(s)	____Improvement(s)	____Outputs	____Strength(s)
____Aptitude	____Direct	____Initiative(s)	____Outreach	____Summative
____Assessment(s)	____Discipline	____Innovation(s)	____Participate(ion)	____Support
____Assurance(s)	____Diversify	____Indicator(s)	____Peer Group	____Technique(s)
____Attitude(s)	____Diversity	____Information Management	____Performance	____Technology
____Benchmark(s)	____Effective(ness)	____Input(s)	____Performance(Indicators)	____Technological
____Beneficiary(ies)	____Effects	____Inspect(ions)	____Persistence	____Theory(ies)
____Benefit(s)	____Efficiency	____Instruction(al)	____Planning	____Transparence(y)
____Bias	____Efficient	____Issue(s)	____Population	____Utility
____Capability(ies)	____Effort(s)	____Judgment(s)	____Positive	____Validate
____Cause	____Environment	____Learn(er)	____Preparation	____Validity
____Certification	____Error(s)	____Learning	____Principle(s)	____Value Added
____Certify	____Evaluate(or)	____Logic	____Professional(ism)	____Value(s)
____Change(s)	____Evaluation	____Logic Model	____Program Review(s)	____Verification
____Cognitive(ion)	____Evaluee	____Manage(r)	____Proof	____Verify
____Comparison(s)	____Evidence	____Mastery	____Prove	____Weakness(es)
____Competence(ies)	____Excellence	____Meaning(ful)	____Purpose(s)	____Weighted
____Competitive	____Expectancy	____Measure(s)	____Quality	____Worth
____Compliance	____Expectations	____Measurement(s)	____Recommendation(s)	

With this information in hand, it was next necessary to refine it in order to produce a more manageable list that could produce meaningful results in a search. Searching a collection of documents for a list of 164^{+} words would be incredibly time consuming, and it would also represent unnecessary effort, since many of the words are related by activities or are similar to each other. At the very least, many are used interchangeably by persons in the education and accreditation fields. During subsequent reviews, the list was shortened to thirty-seven words. That list follows in figure 2.

Figure 2: Modified Key Word Search List

____Accomplishments	____Good Practice
____Accountability	____Improvement(s)
____Accreditation	____Indicator(s)
____Activities	____Instruction(al)
____Administration	____Logic Model
____Assessment(s)	____Measure(s)
____Benchmark(s)	____Mission
____Competencies	____Objectives
____Compliance	____Outcome(s)
____Content	____Indicators
____Curriculum	____Outputs
____Demonstrate	____Performance (Indicators)
____Effectiveness	____Principles
____Environment	____Program Review(s)
____Evaluate	____Requirements
____Evaluation	____Resources
____Evidence	____Review(s)
____Expectations	____Standards
____Goal(s)	

Having reduced the list to a more appropriate length, a thorough document search was conducted to determine which of the words, and how many of each word, would be found in each of the documents. As each word was found anywhere in the document, it was necessary to read each passage to determine that the word was actually being used in some meaningful manner and relationship to accreditation (i.e., not just present as a section heading or an example

of a noun, for instance). Once a valid use was determined, the word was then included on a tally sheet identified by the document that was being searched. This search was performed over seven documents: four created by SACS and three created by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. Every one of the thirty-seven words would not necessarily appear in each of the seven documents, and in some instances, quite a few of the words did not appear at all when the search was performed. However, the list of thirty-seven words was used as a means of further refining the search so that major categories or subjects of a possible logic model could be focused on in future searches.

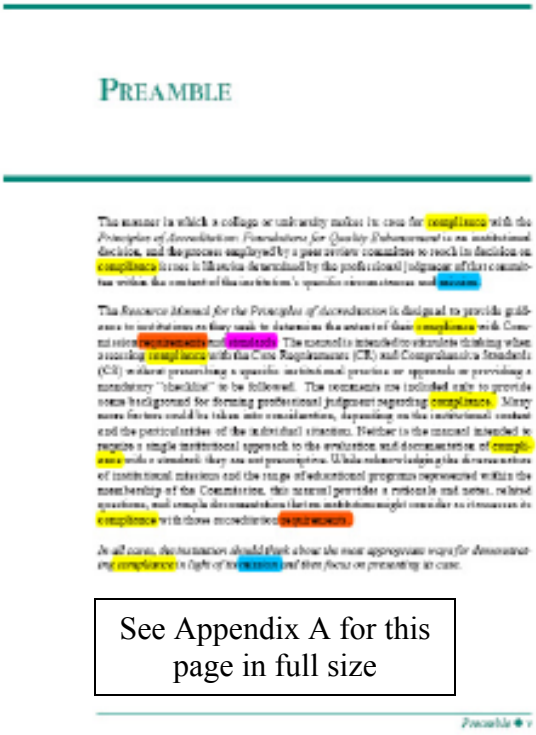
When each of the seven documents had been searched, it was time once again to refine the list. The intent of this further refinement was to select those words that represented major accreditation categories and activities that could reasonably be considered as relevant headings for a logic model. Additionally, the goal was to create a list that reflected the major philosophical qualities and the physical activities that the accreditation process enveloped and relied upon in order to produce the desired results. The intention was that this final list would be comprised of words that would be as inclusive as possible of all of the activities, processes, and major features found in the documents of the accreditation model being examined. This further condensation resulted in a list of seven major key words. That list can be seen in Figure 3 which follows:

Figure 3: Major Category Key Word Search List

____Compliance
____Curriculum
____Mission
____Outcome(s)
____Requirements
____Resources
____Standards

The final document search in the pilot study was for these seven key words. As each of these key words was found, its use was verified as valid. If the word was merely used as a section title, or as part of an outline, or only found in an index, it was not counted. After validity and applicability were determined, each word was highlighted with its own specific color. This process would facilitate the study in three ways. First, the word itself would stand out on the page and could be easily accessed visually. In this way, a reader could identify where each of the key words was used in a particular text or section of the handbook or manual. Second, the passage containing this word could be read and analyzed so as to clarify its meaning, and also shed light upon the passage's intent and perhaps even the underlying philosophical rationale. The third reason is more important to the higher level cognitive analysis that would be necessary in constructing a model. Highlighting each of the seven words with its own color would enable one to visually see the very important structural and interactive relationships between each of the key words. In other words, by directing ones attention to passages where multiple word usage was found, one could analyze the relationships indicated, and also begin to formulate and synthesize a model based upon the underlying relationships this analysis would reveal.

Figure 4

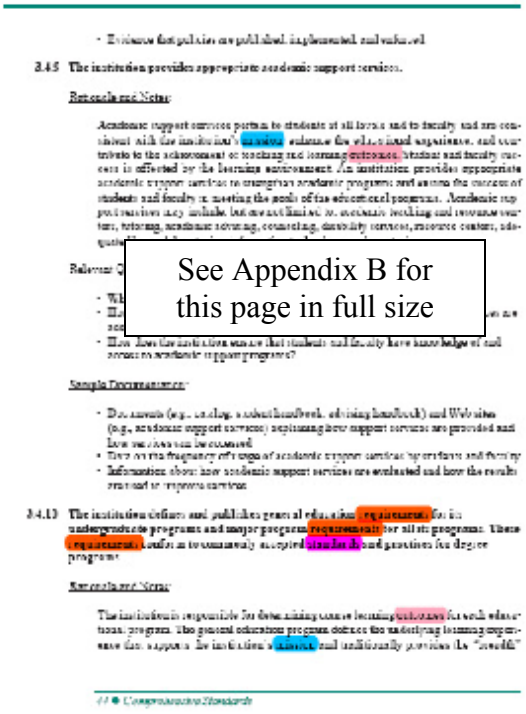


PREAMBLE

See Appendix A for this page in full size

Two sample pages—chosen solely to illustrate the search results and not to indicate any relationships or underlying theory—were taken from SACS documents with the resulting highlighted words. These pages are shown above in Figure 4 and Figure5. It can be seen from a simple visual examination of the pages that the most used word is "compliance," and that five of the seven words are to be found on these two pages. This search was completed or all of the seven documents indicated previously. The results of the search were then compiled for further use.

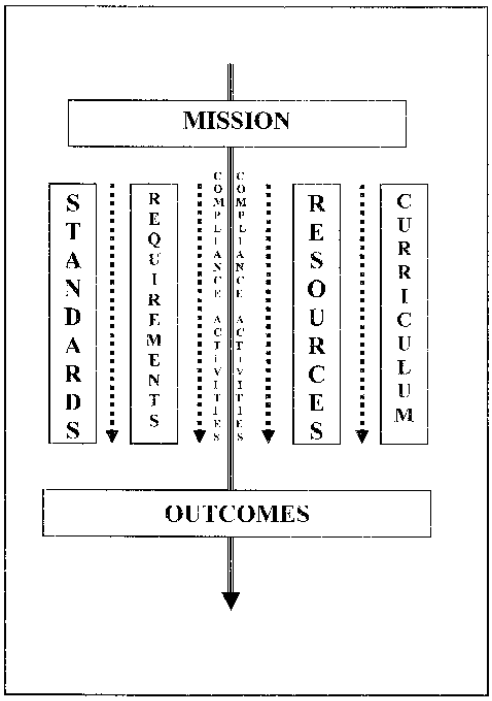
Figure 5



To recap, by visual inspection, the practice study would determine both where the words were to be found in the particular handbook or manual, and also how they were used in the document with reference to one another i.e., their relationship to each other. Using this visualization, along with an understanding of the content of the paragraph or section where the words were found, it was possible to begin to formulate an understanding of the underlying philosophy of the accreditation process. Additionally, a reading of paragraphs in the manuals relative to the stated philosophy, goals and methods SACS endorsed in the accreditation process encouraged the coalescing of an initial mental image. As the words were identified and their interaction became clearer, it became possible to begin the construction of a basic framework formed by the SACS Accreditation Processes. With time and further analysis, it became possible

to understand and appreciate the relative importance in the accreditation process of each key idea, and the interrelationship of the key ideas to each other.

It was next necessary to transform the basic understanding of the key areas and their relationships into something more concrete. Each of these seven key words was used to form a simple, basic skeleton for an underlying logic model that could be developed in more detail based on the stated philosophy, the written descriptions of required actions and procedures, and the underlying operational relationships and interactions the would be developed upon further, higher level analysis and synthesis. This simple basic logic model is shown in the Figure 6 above to the right.



The compliance activities of SACS are so important as to underline and provide the "track" for all of the activities necessary to a successful accreditation or re-accreditation process. In this model, the basic underlying directional force is indicated by the SACS compliance requirements, represented by the central arrow running top to bottom beneath "mission" and "outcomes." Beginning with the institution's mission, and following through to the ultimate outcomes, the institution must demonstrate by gathering data and presenting appropriate evidence to show that its standards, requirements, resources, and curriculum fit into a coordinated procedure that results in the desired mission-related relevant outcomes, which the

institution must also be able to document. Upon further higher level analysis, this diagram will be expanded upon and will subsequently become the proposed SACS Logic Model.

For the pilot study, it was also necessary to show that the data could be utilized for comparison purposes, as it will be necessary in the proposed study to compare the findings for two of the regional accreditation organizations. Accordingly, the results of the search for the seven key words in the SACS documents were compared with the results of the search of the CRAC documents. In doing this, not only can the focus be placed on the overall importance of the key item to the accreditation process, but differences, if any between documents from different sources can be noted. Since these documents were produced by two entities, SACS and The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, these tables serve as the basis for a comparison of the relative importance of these seven key areas to the Commission as a whole and to SACS as one of the member accrediting organizations. The information for SACS follows in Figure 7, followed by the CRAC results in Figure 8.

Figure 7: Key Areas Found in SACS Documents

Document Searched	KEY AREA						
	Compliance	Curriculum	Mission	Outcome(s)	Requirements	Resources	Standards
Principles Of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement	40	3	148	5	41	22	20
Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation	144	9	41	21	28	40	23
Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement	36	40	154	49	61	56	74
Handbook for Review Committees	240	4	23	11	0	14	29

Figure 8: Key Areas Found In CRAC Documents

Document Searched	KEY AREA						
	Compliance	Curriculum	Mission	Outcome(s)	Requirements	Resources	Standards
Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: A Guide for Institutions and Evaluators	0	1	6	8	1	1	5
Regional Accreditation and student Learning: Improving Institutional Practice	6	6	31	28	3	20	1
Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Preparing Teams for Effective Deliberation	0	1	7	8	1	1	5

In looking at the differences in the numbers in the charts above, one fact that obviously stands out is that Key Area Words are used much more often in the SACS documents than in the Council's documents. This can be interpreted as an indication of a difference in emphasis and also a reflection of the philosophical differences between key elements that SACS wants to emphasize to its member institutions and the emphasis of those same areas in the more "generic" and possibly less focused publications produced by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. There is also a difference in the ranking of the key words when comparing the SACS documents to the Council documents. This data of both the different rankings and the difference in the number of times used can be seen in Figure 9, which follows.

Figure 9: Key Word Usage in SACS vs. Council Documents			
Key Word Rank SACS	**No. of Times Used in SACS Documents**	**Key Word Rank Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions**	**No. of Times Used in Council Documents**
# 1 Compliance	460	# 1 Standards	44
#2 Mission	366	#2 Resources	44
#3 Standards	146	#3 Outcomes	22
#4 Resources	142	#4 Curriculum	11
#5 Requirements	130	#5 Mission	8
#6 Outcomes	86	#6 Compliance	6
#7 Curriculum	56	#7 Requirements	5

In looking at this ranking comparison, it would appear, at first blush, that there is a vast difference between what SACS considers more important and what is more important to the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. There is also a readily observable difference in the number of times the words themselves are used, which should also be at least an indication of the different amounts of emphasis placed on the concepts by the two different entities. It is essential to note here that the difference in the usage numbers of the key words is at least partially due to differences in the lengths of the documents themselves, with the SACS documents averaging approximately twice the length of the Council documents. The SACS documents are forty-four, seventy-eight, eighty-three, and ninety pages in length respectively (the average length is seventy-four pages), while the Council documents are thirty-four, forty-five, and thirty-five pages long (the average length is thirty-eight), so it is logical that some of the difference in the total number of times the words are used should be attributable to that distinction. It is also appropriate to note that the words themselves are actually used in a manner both meaningful and appropriate to accreditation. Every non-conceptual use of any of the words

(i.e., as page or chapter headings, as non-materiel descriptors, or as a simple listing in an index, etc.) has been eliminated from the count. Even doubling the number of times the key words are used in the Council documents (to account for the fact that the SACS documents are twice as long as the Council documents), there is still a vast difference in the usage of the words.

What can be safely assumed, and what can be reasonably postulated from these numbers? It would be appropriate to make the following comment: SACS is just one voice out of six in the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. Their voice and the concepts that they might deem to be of importance would be diluted, perhaps even diminished by differences in the philosophies embraced by other commissions' members. Also, the fact that a word such as "compliance" is used 460 times by SACS and only six times by the Commission does not mean that the word is not as important to the Commission. However, it must be noted that the difference is not limited to the "compliance" issues alone. In every instance, the key words are to be found and used more in the SACS documents than in the Commission documents. Even if a study and analysis of the Commission documents alone were to lead to a somewhat similar logic model, there is still the difference in the amount of emphasis placed on the key concepts by SACS when compared to the Commission. A comparison such as this, when using another of the regional accreditation associations, would help to determine if there is a difference in the logic models developed from a study of the each of the other associations.

Based upon numbers alone, the Key Areas in the search appear in this rank in SACS documents: Compliance, 460; Mission, 366; Standards, 146; Resources, 142, Requirements, 130; Outcomes, eighty-six; and Curriculum, fifty-six. The count in word usage carries more impact when seen in the following Figure 10.

Figure 10: SACS KEY SEARCH WORD RANKING		
RANK	**WORD**	**No. of TIMES USED**
#1	Compliance	460
#2	Mission	366
#3	Standards	146
#4	Resources	142
#5	Requirements	130
#6	Outcomes	86
#7	Curriculum	56

It seems apparent that SACS focuses more on "compliance" with its dictums/instructions, if you will…that word is found 460 times in its documents. Perhaps that is as it should be, since SACS is, after all the association that is granting the highly sought-after accreditation. The word "mission" is to be found 366 times, almost 100 fewer times than "compliance" but still 220 more times than "standards". There significance here may be more subtle, and will need to be developed through higher level analysis. While this may not definitively reflect a word's importance, there is striking significance in the number of times these words are used relative to each other. This "weighting" will be kept in mind when developing the final logic models for this study.

Higher Order Cognitive Skills Methodology

Any two individuals could read the same passage and interpret or explain it differently. These variations could arise as a result of interpretation based upon perspective, personal experiences and beliefs, individual vocabulary, educational background, and varying cultural, social, and ethnic differences in readers. For this study it was necessary to come up with some way of eliminating as many variations as possible.

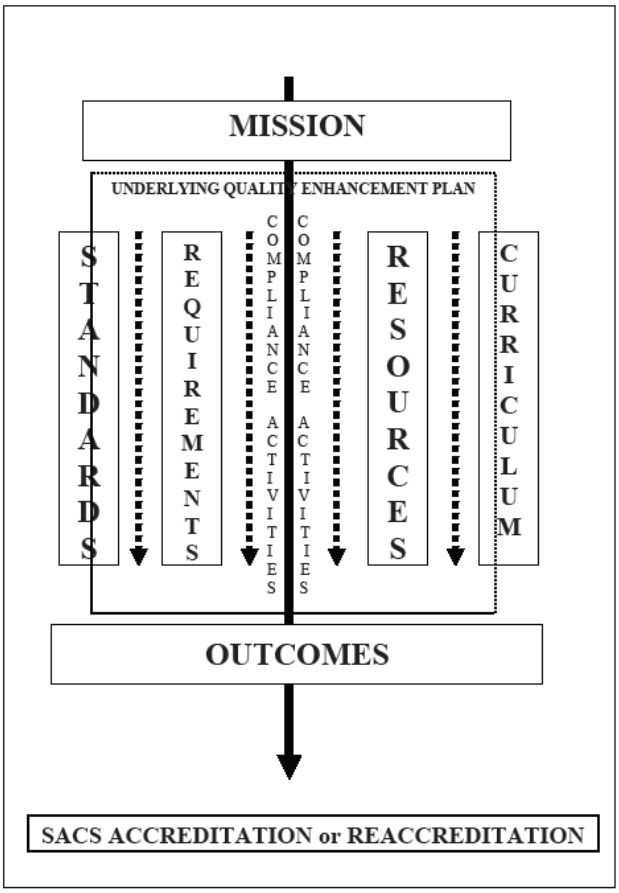
Since the model was developed without the advantage of having any insight and understanding of the intent and objectives of the authors of the SACS Accreditation/Re-accreditation process, it of necessity was derived from as good an understanding of and as much familiarity with the processes as could be developed after the fact by reading and studying the manuals. It should be pointed out here that this is not a unique process. Many current and future accreditation participants will be reading handbooks and manuals after the fact as they prepare for the roles they will play in the process. Also, since the Commission documents refer so minimally to the identified key words, these documents will only serve in a supportive role rather than as a major source of insight. My analysis of the documents proposes a model as if I had played a personal role in the development process.

Since Figure #6 is the first, somewhat skeletal framework utilizing the seven key words selected for use in this investigation, it needs to be developed more, based upon the content contained in the SACS documentation. The model at this point simply includes the key words, with no indications of any weight or significance and no implications of the nature of any relationships between them. Relationships between these words and the model that they would best fit into began to coalesce and gel as I continued to work with the documents. As my thinking about the model progressed, I applied refinements to the model. The most important of these additions relates to the concept of "Quality Enhancement." This concept may be unique to the SACS accreditation model, although further study into other regions may reveal otherwise. Some background information relative to this concept is in order here.

As referenced numerous times previous to this, changes in accreditation have come about as a result of many factors, such as criticisms, social and political environments, fiscal and economic pressures, and the like. As a consequence of the more recent pressures on

accreditation to be more accountable and show results, SACS has, over this time, been incorporating new concepts into its design. The most recent concept is that of "Quality Enhancement," which SACS has been using for the past few years. Under this philosophical approach, the institution's printed mission or purpose statement becomes the focal point of the accreditation/re-accreditation process. Beginning with this statement, every institution must now examine itself and determine whether or not it is achieving its stated goals. The primary goal of the self examination is not to reveal failures, although there might presumably be some. The assumption is that the self-examination will reveal areas of success and areas that need some improvements. After completing this self-examination, each institution is to establish its own plan detailing what steps it will take to achieve some "enhancement" to the quality of the products and/or services it is providing. There are no predetermined areas of concern, there are no specific programs or departments that are to be singled out for investigation, there are no specific problem areas under review. Instead, the institution is to look at itself as a whole to determine where it feels it can best apply itself to improve and "enhance" its activities as an educational institution. The institution is to look at and examine the standards that it follows, the curricula it designs and uses, the resources it develops and commits to its objectives, and the internal requirements it attempts to meet. All of these factors will come into play in the accreditation process for a SACS institution. Remembering, though, that a logic model is most effective when it does not attempt to show too much detail, the next step in the development of the logic model is to incorporate the quality enhancement concept. That is illustrated in the still simplified and somewhat basic SACS model in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: SACS Quality Enhancement Framework



In the model above, the "quality enhancement plan" is shown underlying the basic activities between "mission" and "outcomes." Each institution is required to develop its own individual "Quality Enhancement Plan," which then becomes the basis for its data-collection and documentation activities of its self-study. This underlying enhancement plan at any institution will change based upon the results of its internal department meetings, data collection, and self-evaluation studies. For that reason it underlies the entire accreditation process.

The development of a more completed model than the one above relies upon more of the higher level cognitive skills alluded to earlier in the chapter. Each of the documents used as a

source of information required thorough reading and studying. In order to illustrate and explain the higher level cognitive processes required for this stage of the study, it is necessary to make direct reference to selected sections of the documentation and then describe how they were used to add more depth—more flesh, if you will—to the skeletal model thus developed. Since this is to be a model based upon characteristics that SACS considers necessary and invaluable to accreditation, it was necessary to search for any statements or allusions made in the documents that was indicative of such value. Generally speaking, the regional commissions all speak to their goals and expectations at the beginning of their publications, so the introductory materials to each were studied in detail. This was the starting point of an inquiry into what SACS considers to be of major importance.

In *Principles of Accreditation*, the Commission states the following: "The first task of the Commission when considering accreditation status is to determine the institution's integrity and its commitment to quality enhancement. These two principles serve as the foundation of the relationship between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions" (SACS, Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, pg. 4). This quotation is not included here to imply the wrong impression. The Commission document goes on to explain that, regarding an institution's ethics, the Commission expects all of its member institutions to be open and honest with them in all of their transactions. This, obviously, justifies the inclusion of this requirement in the finished model. The concept of Quality enhancement has been previously discussed and shown in a skeletal model form, but the discussion is included here indicate just how important this concept is to SACS when it considers an institution's accreditation. "The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation; this presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and

able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution's educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major aspects" (SACS, Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, pg. 5). Since the institution's integrity and its commitment to the quality enhancement concept are so important, their previous inclusion in the basic model—essentially as a base for the accreditation track—has been indicated by the quality enhancement portion of the model which underpins the accreditation process and is supported on the compliance requirement track.

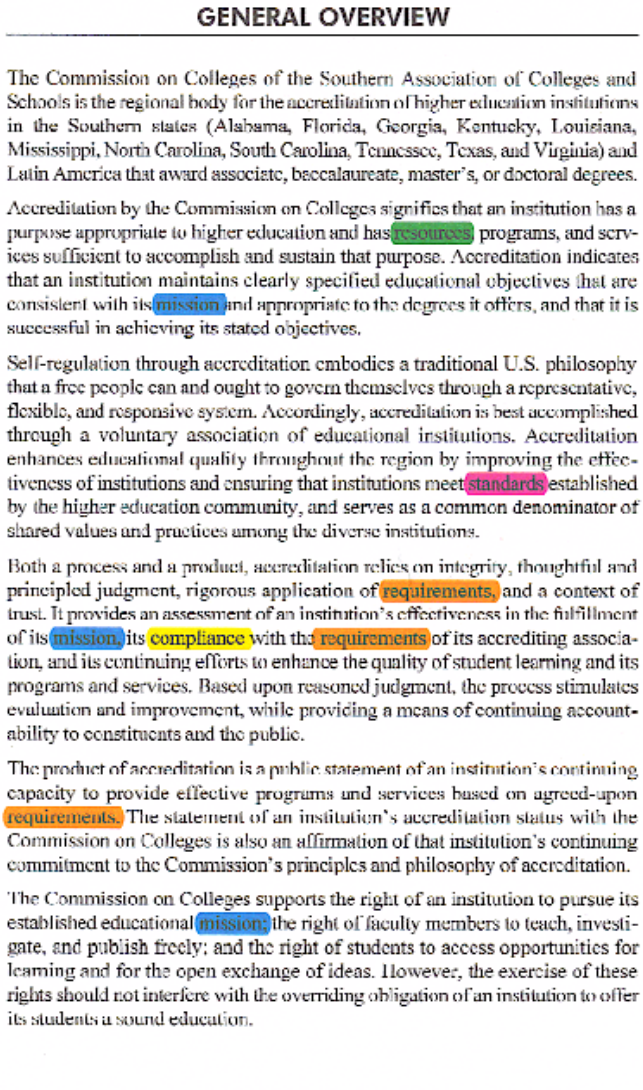
The prior examples were relatively straightforward and direct. It was not difficult to read them and comprehend their worth, nor was it difficult to fathom the value that SACS places on the concepts of ethics and quality enhancement. SACS, after all, plainly stated that they were to serve as the foundation…they simply have to be included in the model in such a way as to indicate that they are part of the foundation. It is more difficult indeed to transmit conceptual information concerning the relative value and worth of items or concepts when using the written word alone.

The following page, the General Overview [of Accreditation], is taken in its entirety from the introductory pages of the same manual, Principles of Accreditation. Based upon a simple word count alone, it can be seen that five of the seven Key Words appear on this page—resources, mission, standards, requirements, and compliance. It is perhaps significant in this study that there is no reference is made to curriculum or to outcomes. These two of the key words, it will be remembered, were used the fewest total number of times in all the SACS documents studied.

In postulating the underlying relationships these word have to each other and to the overall accreditation process, one will have to analyze the sentences which contain the words; look for the overall sense of meaning that the that this overview is conveying; and understand when and how the words are indicative of the fundamental principles and philosophy of SACS Accreditation. We are told on this page that: (1) accreditation by the Commission signifies that the institution uses it resources in a manner consistent with its mission; (2) the institution has met standards established for higher education institutions; (3) there will be rigorous application of the requirements to determine that the institution is fulfilling its mission in compliance with SACS requirements; (4) SACS accreditation is a public statement that the institution meets certain requirements; and (5) The Commission supports the right of an institution to pursue its established mission. It should also be noted that, even though "outcomes" as such were not mentioned, there is a reference to the institution "enhancing the quality of student learning".

What do these words tell us? They tells us that the accreditation process is based upon an institution meeting requirements and standards, and that the institutional mission will be key in determining if the institution is utilizing its resources effectively. It also tells us that an institution must be in compliance with the requirements of the accrediting association. Our model, therefore, should indicate that the accreditation process will proceed from the perspective of the institutional mission. The model should show that the resources are used effectively for that mission, and should be used so that the institution and its actions meet certain standards. And our model should indicate that the institution is expected to remain in compliance with all of the association's requirements. This process is repeated for each page in the document under review. The General Overview page, from which the above relationships were developed, is shown in Figure 11, which follows.

Figure 11: Sample Page with Highlighted Keywords for Relationship Analysis



GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is the regional body for the accreditation of higher education institutions in the Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) and Latin America that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees.

Accreditation by the Commission on Colleges signifies that an institution has a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that purpose. Accreditation indicates that an institution maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that it is successful in achieving its stated objectives.

Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions. Accreditation enhances educational quality throughout the region by improving the effectiveness of institutions and ensuring that institutions meet standards established by the higher education community, and serves as a common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions.

Both a process and a product, accreditation relies on integrity, thoughtful and principled judgment, rigorous application of requirements, and a context of trust. It provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services. Based upon reasoned judgment, the process stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public.

The product of accreditation is a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements. The statement of an institution's accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges is also an affirmation of that institution's continuing commitment to the Commission's principles and philosophy of accreditation.

The Commission on Colleges supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; and the right of students to access opportunities for learning and for the open exchange of ideas. However, the exercise of these rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

3

As previously stated, the process described and indicated above using the General Overview page from Principles of Accreditation should be repeated as necessary through the examination of the highlighted documents. The construction of a model should begin at an early point in the study as a mental image begins to take shape. This initial model will change many times during the progress of the study before it is finalized. At its completion, it may or may not even resemble the initial model. A detailed examination of the key words and the underlying relationships will produce a great deal of information and suggest many possibilities. Assembling a model from too much information can be a struggle. Since the model should only contain absolutely essential information, beginning with a simple structure facilitates keeping on track and focusing on the more important elements of the model. As the skeletal model is added to with additional features, the recognition or realization of necessary changes will occur. Whether these changes are in the form of additions to or subtractions from the model, or whether these changes require substantial revision in the shape or form of the model, the basic focus already established will remain as the foundation for any modifications. The creation of a model may require few or many attempts, and there may be numerous options for its shape and its track. Beginning with a basic, skeletal model and generating modifications as necessitated will aid in staying on track and maintaining orientation during the logic modeling activities.

The SACS Logic Model being presented here begins with assumptions. These assumptions would be defined by the institution's stated mission and/or goals. With these assumptions in mind, the institution is expected to be participating in the ongoing compliance activities, indicated by the two outside arrows. The underpinning of the SACS accreditation process, the Quality Enhancement Plan, is indicated by the large central arrow. Under this Quality Enhancement Plan, or QEP, every institution is expected to select one area, program,

topic or issue(s) that are unique to it. The institution should then focus upon the selected issue and expend its institutional effort toward improvement in that area. Institutions are expected to be collecting data and evidence regarding "Inputs" and "Activities". They are also expected to be collecting evidence and data with regard to the "Outputs" and "Outcomes" of their activities. All of this data regarding inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes does not relate directly to the QEP. In the words of SACS: "The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) directly related to enhancing student learning. Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues but, in all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies need to be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning."(SACS Website, Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, pg 21). For that reason, some of the inputs and activities are shown as flowing toward the QEP, and some flow directly to outputs and outcomes. The same characterization is true of the outputs and the activities; therefore their flow is shown either in the direction of the QEP or toward the evaluation/accreditation process for the institution. The end result of all of the activities, data collection, and information processing is the granting of Accreditation or Reaccreditation, which is indicated by the last figure in the model. This stage of the development of the logic model is indicated in the following Figure 12 below.

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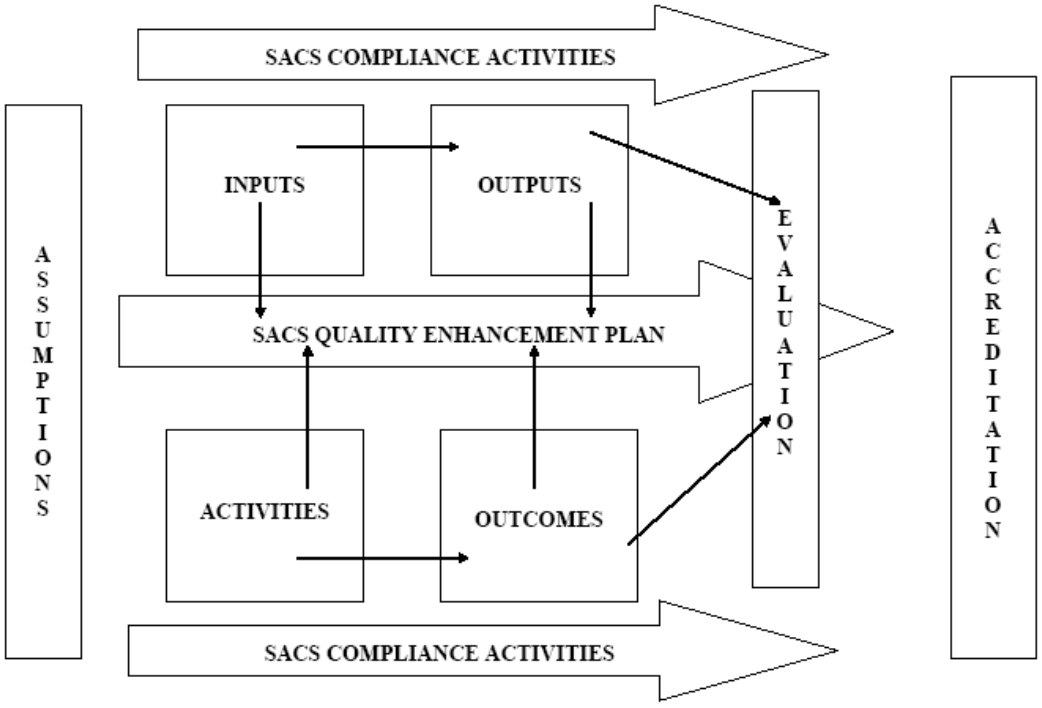
Figure 12: SACS Logic Model



To draw this discussion of methodology to a close, a quick recap is in order first. The purpose of this proposed research was to begin the development of a workable, valid logic model of the accreditation process. The underlying hypothesis is that a logic model will greatly aid in improving the results of accreditation, and also may be beneficial to eliminating variances in the application of the process. "The application of the logic model as a planning tool allows precise communication about the purposes of a project, the components of a project, and the sequence of activities and accomplishments. Further, a project originally designed with assessment in mind is much more likely to yield beneficial data, should evaluation be desired" (McCawley, P., 1997). A pilot study was conducted to determine the possibility of creating a logic model of an

accreditation process already in existence. The methodology utilized in the pilot study has been detailed and described previously in this chapter. This methodology led to the development of an accreditation logic model based upon one of the regional accreditation organizations.

This study was designed to expand the pilot study of the Regional Accreditation Organizations by combining the regional accreditation organization already used for the pilot study—SACS—with the addition of one other regional accreditation organization—North Central. This study will result in the creation of two logic models: one model representing the accreditation process utilized by SACS and one model representing the accreditation process utilized by North Central. The two logic models thus created can be compared and contrasted, and an attempt will be made to combine the two logic models into one unified logic model for the accreditation process.

It is hoped that this initial study of the accreditation processes of two of the six regional accreditation organizations will lead to a functional, viable, unified logic model of the two accreditation associations. If this study is repeated in the additional regional associations it is possible to propose a unified, national model of accreditation based upon the six regional accreditation organizations. Currently, the results of the accreditation process are criticized in part as not working and as being inconsistent. This unified logic model of accreditation could become the basis for developing future improvements and proposing modifications directed toward improving the communication and application processes. Additionally, it is hypothesized that this unified logic model would result in more consistency—whether the process is applied by one of the six regional organizations or by one of the recognized professional accreditation organizations who could also benefit by structuring their accreditation process on this unified logic model.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction to Findings

The documents relative to Accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges (SACS) and Schools and the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS) were obtained and examined. An analysis, as outlined in Chapter 3, was conducted on documents obtained from each regional accreditation source. The results of that analysis are presented here, beginning with the SACS findings.

SACS Findings

With respect to SACS, the following findings and accreditation related issues can be noted:

There are two SACS publications which directly state the requirements necessary to obtain accreditation or reaccreditation. These publications are similar in their scope, and, as such, duplicate a great deal of the material. The *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* presents the Southern Association's requirements and standards. The *Resource Manual for Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* provides additional rationale, guidance, and examples to institutions in the process of determining their compliance with the requirements and standards of accreditation. Both publications provided insight into accreditation process, and thus aided in the development of the underlying SACS logic model.

In *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, SACS states in Section 1 that "The Commission evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on the following:

- Compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, defined as integrity and commitment to quality enhancement (outlined in Section 1).
- Compliance with the Core Requirements (outlined in Section 2).
- Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards (outlined in Section 3).
- Compliance with additional Federal Requirements (outlined in Section 4)"

(SACS, Principles of Accreditation, pg. 7).

It can therefore be stated that an accurate SACS logic model, of necessity, will have to incorporate Integrity, Quality Enhancement, Comprehensive Standards, Core Requirements, and Federal Requirements. There is quite a bit of verbiage in the two noted publications, but for consolidation and comparison purposes, this wordiness can be reduced, and subsequently is briefly and concisely listed here.

The SACS Core Requirements are:

Degree Granting Authority

5-Member Governing Board

Non Board Member CEO

Stated Institutional Mission

Ongoing Institutional Effectiveness

Continuously Operates with Students

Degree Programs with appropriate length and content, meeting General Education Requirements, with appropriate course work instruction

Adequate full time Faculty

Adequate and appropriate library and learning resources

Student Support Services promoting learning and development

Sound, stable financial base with adequate resources

Quality Enhancement Plan part of ongoing planning and evaluation

The SACS Comprehensive Standards are:

Clear, comprehensive, stated Mission

Appropriate Governance and Administration Procedures

Institutional Effectiveness Plan with defined outcomes and evidence procedures

Suitable, appropriate and effective Educational Programs

Undergraduate programs with minimum of 25% earned at the institution

Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs

Competent, qualified, credentialed Faculty to achieve Mission and reach Goals

Adequate Library and other Learning Resources

Stated and disseminated clear and appropriate Student Affairs Services

Financial and Physical Resources demonstrating stability and adequacy

The SACS-Incorporated Federal Requirements are:

Evaluate Student Achievement relative to Mission, and to course completion, licensing examinations, and job placement

Maintain Curriculum related to goals, purposes, and degrees or certificates awarded

Published Academic Calendars, Grading Policies, and Refund Policies

Appropriate program length for degrees offered

Procedures for addressing written student complaints and evidence of adherence

Accurate recruitment materials and presentations representative of the institution

Published Accreditor Information (Name, Address, Phone Number)

Demonstrate compliance with Title IV of 1998 Higher Education Amendments

This listing is a complete and accurate inventory of all of the requirements for achieving accreditation from SACS. However, it is far too much material to attempt to incorporate into a logic model, the contents of which should be kept the absolute minimum. As such, an attempt should be made to work it into the model while keeping the model clear and succinct. For that reason, the next step in consolidating and condensing the findings is to arrange this information in table format. The basic requirements, condensed to title headings, are as follows:

Figure 13: SACS ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS		
Integrity		Quality Enhancement
Core Requirements	**Comprehensive Standards**	**Federal Requirements**
Degree Granting Authority	Mission	Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement
5-Member Governing Board	Governance/Administrative Procedures	Curriculum
Non Board Member CEO	Institutional Effectiveness Plan	Published Calendar and Policies
Stated Institutional Mission	Suitable, Effective Educational Programs	Degree Program Length
Ongoing Institutional Effectiveness Program	Undergraduate Program Requirements	Written Complaint Policies
Continuous operation with students	Graduate/Professional Program Requirements	Accurate Representative Recruitment Materials
Degree and Program Requirements	Qualified Credentialed Faculty	Published Accreditor Information
Adequate Full-time Faculty	Library/Learning Resources	Title IV Higher Education Amendments
Adequate Library/Learning Resources	Student Affairs Services	
Student Support Services	Stable Financial/Physical Resources	
Financial Soundness and Stability		
Quality Enhancement Plan		

These requirements will next be grouped by highlighting with similar background colors. The colors used are for visual grouping purposes only and bear no relation to the colors used and identified in the methodology used in Chapter 3. Each item below is also followed by a number to indicate its group without the use of color:

Figure 14: SACS ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Integrity (4)	Quality Enhancement (2)	
Core Requirements	**Comprehensive Standards**	**Federal Requirements**
Degree Granting Authority (3)	Mission (4)	Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement (2)
5-Member Governing Board (3)	Governance/Administrative Procedures (3)	Curriculum (1)
Non Board Member CEO (3)	Institutional Effectiveness Plan (2)	Published Calendar and Policies (5)
Stated Institutional Mission (4)	Suitable, Effective Educational Programs (1)	Degree Program Length (1)
Ongoing Institutional Effectiveness Program (2)	Undergraduate Program Requirements (1)	Written Complaint Policies (7)
Continuous operation with students (5)	Graduate/Professional Program Requirements(1)	Accurate Representative Recruitment Materials (5)
Degree and Program Requirements (1)	Qualified Credentialed Faculty (9)	Published Accreditor Info. (5)
Adequate Full-time Faculty (9)	Library/Learning Resources (6)	Title IV Higher Ed. Amendments (3)
Adequate Library/Learning Resources (6)	Student Affairs Services (7)	
Student Support Services (7)	Stable Financial/Physical Resources(8)	
Financial Soundness and Stability(8)		
Quality Enhancement Plan (2)		

As a result of this initial color coding, these stated requirements can now be gathered into their related groups, the background shading can be removed, and any duplications can be identified by a strikethrough. It should be noted that the above relationships are not intended to be defining in any way. There is certainly room for individual interpretation when the requirements for accreditation are grouped. However, any individualization should result in minor differences of opinion, and not in major categorization or classification differences. The important concept is that all of the requirements be represented in the completed logic model.

Figure 15: SACS ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Grouping 1	Grouping 2	Grouping 3
Curriculum Suitable, Effective Ed. Programs Degree Program Length Undergraduate Program Requirements Graduate/Professional Program Requirements ~~Degree and Program Requirements~~	Quality Enhancement Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement Institutional Effectiveness Plan ~~Ongoing Institutional Effectiveness Program~~ ~~Quality Enhancement Plan~~	Degree Granting Authority 5-Member Governing Board Non Board Member CEO Governance/Administrative Procedures Title IV Higher Ed Amendments
Grouping 4	**Grouping 5**	**Grouping 6**
Integrity Mission ~~Stated Institutional Mission~~	Published Calendar and Policies Accurate Representative Recruitment Materials Published Accreditor Information Continuous Operation with Students	~~Library/Learning Resources~~ Adequate Library/Learning Resources
Grouping 7	**Grouping 8**	**Grouping 9**
Written Complaint Policies Student Affairs Services Student Support Services	Stable Financial/Physical Resources Financial Soundness and Stability	Qualified Credentialed Faculty Adequate Full-time Faculty

These requirements grouped above can now be placed into a table organized and labeled with the major categories of activities from the accreditation model. It should be recognized that

some of the requirements will overlap or fall into more than one major categories. Recognizing this, the table should be thorough and as brief and concise as possible, since the resulting model should, of necessity, contain very few words, and should only consist of the major activities and processes required in the development, preparation, organization, and communication of the impending accreditation review by SACS. The requirements and activities in the Accreditation Model Table (Phase 1) below are in no particular order, and there is no implied significance in the order of their listing within each part of the model.

Figure 16: SACS ACCREDITATION MODEL (Phase 1)

Assumptions	Compliance	Quality Enhancement
Integrity, Mission, Degree Granting Authority, Continuous Operational Status w/students, Financial Stability	Governance, Administrative Procedures, CEO, Board, Degree Requirements, Program Length, Recruiting Materials, Calendar and Policies, Title IV H.E.A., Accreditor Information, Financial Stability	QEP, Institutional Effectiveness
Inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**
Curriculum, Program Requirements, Faculty, Library, Facilities	Faculty, Student Affairs, Financial Stability, Curriculum, Complaints,	Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement
Outcomes	**Evaluation**	**Accreditation**
Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement	Institutional Effectiveness Plan	

In order to ensure that the above categories of the model are completely represented by the activities and requirements of the SACS accreditation process, it is necessary to look next at the two other SACS documents (*Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation* and *Handbook for Review Committees*) that were utilized in the development of the logic model for the SACS

accreditation process. As expected, these documents repeat and reinforce the above requirements for accreditation. For logic model development purposes, they have additional value. They provide added insight into the underlying principles and philosophy encompassed by the SACS accreditation process. The Handbook for Reaffirmation provides "…guidance for institutions conducting an internal assessment of their compliance with the Commission's accreditation standards to prepare for the external evaluation of compliance by off-site and on-site review committees" (*Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, pg. 1). The Handbook for Review Committees describes "…the process for off-site and on-site reviewers and chairs to follow while preparing to serve on a review committee" (*Handbook for Review Committees*, pg. 1). The information provided by these two publications gives much needed insight into the official SACS position on the proper preparation for and application of the accreditation processes. This additional information should be incorporated into the logic model, because it comprises a good portion of the reasoning and the rationale behind the development of this particular accreditation process—the reasons why, if you will, that this regional association's accreditation process acquired the shape and the structure that characterize it presently. The model that is developed should incorporate and reflect the following highlighted information:

The *Handbook for Review Committees* lists major concepts on which their accreditation process depends. These are:

- Comply with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards contained in the *Principles* and the policies and procedures of the Commission on College—(**Compliance with Requirements, Standards, policies and procedures**).
- Enhance the quality of its educational programs—(**Enhanced quality**).

- Focus on student learning—(**Student learning**).
- Ensure a 'culture of integrity' in all of its operations—(**Culture of integrity**).
- Recognize the centrality of peer review to the effectiveness of its accreditation process—(**Peer review**).

(*Handbook for Review Committees*, pgs. 2-3).

The Handbook for Reaffirmation provides further information concerning the rationale behind the SACS process by listing the following benefits that could be derived from its internal review:

- Examine its mission statement to determine whether it accurately reflects its values, aspirations, and commitments to constituent groups—(**Mission accurately reflects institutional values, aspiration, commitments**).
- Review its goals, programs, and services to determine the extent to which they reflect its mission—(**Mission reflected in institutional culture**).
- Use the analysis of its compliance with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs, operations, and services—(**Assess institutional effectiveness**).
- Strive for a level of performance that will challenge it to move beyond the status quo or beyond simply accepting a level of performance that, in its judgment, constitutes compliance with the accreditation requirements and standards—(**Increased performance levels beyond minimum**).
- Build or enhance its database as an ongoing documentation of its continuous improvement as well as evidence of its compliance with the

Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards—(**Accurate data for documentation and evidence**).

- Reinforce the concept of accreditation as an ongoing rather than episodic event—(**Accreditation a continuing activity**).
- Develop a Quality Enhancement Plan that will deal with an issue or issues that are important to its entire community and that demonstrate promise of making a significant impact on the quality of student learning—(**QEP significantly impacts student learning quality**).
- Strengthen the sense of involvement of all members of its community in enhancing institutional quality and effectiveness—(**Increased involvement of total institutional community**).
- Demonstrate its accountability to constituents and the public—(**Evident civic accountability**)

(*Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, pg. 3).

The above highlighted actions and activities can now to be incorporated into the following Accreditation Model Table (Phase 2). These incorporated actions and activities will assist in completing and finishing this phase in the representation of the accreditation actions and activities that are required by SACS from its member institutions. When finished, the completed Accreditation Model Table will be used as the basis for creating the final representation of the SACS Logic Mode of the accreditation process. This table is shown below. This table (Phase 2) is nearly complete; there is some final information that still has to be incorporated before the SACS Logic Model can be completed.

Figure 17: SACS ACCREDITATION MODEL (Phase 2)		
Assumptions Integrity, Mission, Authority, Legal Status, Operational Status w/students, Financial Stability	Compliance Governance, Administrative Procedures, CEO, Board, Degree Requirements, Program Length, Recruiting Materials, Calendar and Policies, Title IV H.E.A., Accreditor Information, Financial Stability	Quality Enhancement QEP, Institutional Effectiveness, **Significant Impact on Student Learning, Data Collection,**
Inputs Curriculum, Programs, Faculty, Degree Requirements, Library, Facilities	Activities Faculty, Student Affairs, Financial Stability, Curriculum, Complaints, **Culture of Integrity, Mission Reflected, Increased Performance Levels, Documentation, Civic Accountability**	Outputs Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement, **Assessment Activities, Community Involvement, Enhanced Quality, Student Learning**
Outcomes Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement, **Enhanced Quality, Student Learning, Increased Performance Levels**	Evaluation **Ongoing Procedures, Data Collection, Documentation, Evidence,**	Accreditation **Compliance w/all Requirements Standards Policies and procedures, Continuing Activity, Documentation, Evidence, Peer Review,**

The information that remains to be incorporated into this table will be derived from two sources. One source will be an examination and analysis of any specific directions or directives required by SACS in the published manuals and handbooks. The other source will be any components of the model that are implied by the relationships of the key words to each other and/or to any required activities mandated during the process of SACS accreditation. As stated above, the table following table (Phase 3) has been completed by the addition of this information to that previously derived from the stated core requirements, comprehensive standards, and

federal requirements. The nine categories of the SACS Accreditation Logic Model are shown below. The additional model components that are incorporated below cover the SACS rules and requirements relative to data collection, the characteristics of acceptable evidence, the preparation of necessary reports, and the expected actions and activities of the internal and external review teams during the accreditation/reaccreditation process.

Figure 18: SACS ACCREDITATION MODEL(Phase 3)

Assumptions	Compliance	Quality Enhancement
Integrity, Mission, Authority, Legal Status, Operational Status w/students, Financial Stability	Governance, Administrative Procedures, CEO, Board, Degree Requirements, Program Length, Recruiting Materials, Calendar and Policies, Title IV H.E.A., Accreditor Information, Financial Stability	QEP, Institutional Effectiveness, Significant Impact on Student Learning, Data Collection, **QEP Development, Review by On-site Team, Impact Report**
Inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**
Curriculum, Programs, Faculty, Degree Requirements, Library, Facilities, **Leadership Team, QEP Development,**	Faculty, Student Affairs, Financial Stability, Curriculum, Complaints, Culture of Integrity, Mission Reflected, Increased Performance Levels, Documentation, Civic Accountability, **Leadership Team, QEP Development**	Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement, Assessment Activities, Community Involvement, Enhanced Quality, Student Learning
Outcomes	**Evaluation**	**Accreditation**
Achievement, Licensing, Job Placement, Enhanced Quality, Student Learning, Increased Performance Levels	Ongoing Procedures, Data Collection, Documentation, Evidence, **Evaluation of Evidence, Report Preparation, Compliance Certification Document**	Compliance w/all Requirements Standards Policies and procedures, Continuing Activity, Documentation, Evidence, **Evidence Requirements, Peer Review, Off-site Team, On-site Team, Report Preparation, Review by Commission on Colleges**

It is important to keep in mind that this chart and the resulting logic model must be kept as succinct and concise as possible. The above table will lead directly to the logic model, which, it should be remembered, is more of a road map of the accreditation process than a complete and complex description of the actions and activities that will be required. It is also necessary to allow some latitude, or breathing room, for the decisions that have been made regarding the inclusion or exclusion of items and activities in the chart and subsequent logic model. It is possible that another writer/researcher would have used other words, included slightly different categories or groupings, or utilized different valuation methods when determining what information to include. As referenced earlier, the importance of this logic model is that it convey the essences of the actions, activities, methods, and the logic and rationale of the processes that will be employed in the impending institutional review leading to SACS Accreditation or reaffirmation of Accreditation.

The SACS Logic Model being presented here begins with assumptions that are predicated upon, and defined by, the institution's Mission Statement. These assumptions include: The Institution's stated Mission and/or Goals, Evidence with regard to the existence of Good Practice on the part of the institution, the existence of an institutional Environment of Learning, and the existence of an institution-wide commitment to Effectiveness. With these assumptions in mind, the institution is expected to be involved in the ongoing activities of reviewing itself, its actions and practices, and in collecting evidence to demonstrate that it is doing so. As a facet of the accreditation process, SACS now expects its member institutions to be collecting data and evidence regarding three major categories that are shown in the model. Two of these three are "Inputs" and "Activities." There is also, underlying the entire accreditation process, the relatively new concept of "Quality Enhancement" which is indicated by the central arrow

underlying the entire model. This concept of "quality enhancement" has become a required fundamental component of the accreditation/reaccreditation model. Under this "quality enhancement plan," or QEP, every institution is expected to select one area, program, topic or issue(s) that is/are unique to it. The institution will focus upon the selected issue and expend its institutional effort toward improvement in that area. The following words of SACS detail their view of this QEP:

> The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) directly related to enhancing student learning. Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues but, in all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies need to be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning. In order to ensure that the QEP is implemented, the institution integrates it into its ongoing planning and evaluation process. … At the time of the on-site review, the Commission expects an institution to have in place all components that are characteristic to any workable plan: (1) a focused topic (directly related to student learning), (2) clear goals, (3) adequate resources in place to implement the plan, (4) evaluation strategies for determining the achievement of goals, and (5) evidence of community development and support of the plan.
>
> (SACS Website, *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, pg 21).

This SACS Accreditation Logic Model is constructed to indicate that institutions are expected to be engaged in the activities of collecting evidence and reviewing their institutional

activities on a constant basis—not just at the times dictated by the periodic SACS accreditation review. As a result, these activities are indicated by the arrows that underlie the entire process.

These data collection activities are directed toward what are now the two major components of the evaluation and subsequent accreditation/reaccreditation process: a general review of the institution's compliance activities by an off-site review committee, and a review of the institution's QEP by the on-site review committee. SACS has summarized their view of the role of these committees in the following: "Two review committees, the Off-Site Review Committee and the On-Site Review Committee, are charged with assessing institutional compliance. The Off-Site Committee reviews several institutions that have submitted Compliance Certifications and is charged with determining whether each institution is in compliance with all Core Requirements except Twelve, which deals with the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), with all Comprehensive Standards, and with the federal regulations" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 7). SACS instructs members of this committee to, on an individual basis, review the Compliance Certifications, which have been previously submitted to SACS by the institution. The full committee then meets in Atlanta to reach agreement on its findings, and to prepare its report. These actions and activities are completed before the visit by the On-Site Review Committee.

The next step, then, is the review by the On-Site Review Committee, which "…is charged with determining whether an institution is in compliance with Core Requirement Twelve (QEP) and with all Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards for which the report of the Off-Site Review Committee indicated 'non-compliance' or 'did not review.' The On-Site Review Committee will not review further the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards with which the Off-Site Review Committee has determined the institution to be in compliance

unless concerns arise during the on-site visit that justify a review" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 8).

As the Handbook for Review Committees now indicates, the on-site review, which formerly was the major review of the institution covering all facets of its compliance activities, now specifically addresses only the QEP (and requirements not expressly addressed by the Off-Site Review Committee) unless it deems that it has found other concerns. The QEP, which purposely addresses issues related to student learning, has become a major, defining factor in the accreditation process. The QEP is now to be the new focus for SACS when it conducts its periodic on-site re-accreditation reviews. Again, in the words of SACS: "The adoption in 2001 of the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement by the Commission on Colleges introduced significant changes in the approach to accreditation and reaffirmation. The institution's effectiveness and its ability to create and sustain an environment that enhances student learning is the focus of this new approach. The process is designed to determine the quality of an institution within the framework of its mission, its goals, and its analysis of and response to crucial institutional issues" (Handbook for Review Committees, pg. 2).

All member institutions of SACS should now be collecting this evidence regarding what is shown in the model as Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes, and the QEP. The evidence is expected to demonstrate to SACS that the institution is in compliance with its requirements in the following areas: SACS Comprehensive Standards, SACS Core Requirements (which now includes the QEP), and any Federal Requirements.

With reference to the evidence being assembled and presented by the institutions, SACS tells its institutions that they will need to honestly evaluate the evidence they intend to submit. SACS provides the following guidance regarding the evaluation of evidence: "This evaluation

should be based on a careful interpretation of the Core Requirements and the Comprehensive Standards and on the cogency of the evidence to be presented supporting compliance with them. Evidence is not simply an amassed body of facts, information, data, or exhibits. Instead it is a coherent and focused body of information supporting a judgment of compliance" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 17). Additionally, SACS provides the information regarding the characteristics it expects in the evidence presented: "…Reliable …Current …Verifiable …Coherent …Objective …Relevant …and Representative" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 17). Additionally, SACS expects that evidence should: "Entail interpretation and reflection…Represent a combination of trend and 'snapshot' data… and Draw from multiple indicators" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 18).

SACS provides additional perspective into what it expects to be the outcome of the incorporation of the QEP into the accreditation process. "While many aspects of the accreditation process focus on the past and the present, the QEP is 'forward-looking' and thus transforms the process into an ongoing activity rather than an episodic event. Core Requirement 2.12 requires an institution to have a plan for increasing the effectiveness of some aspect of its educational program related to student learning. The plan launches a process that can move the institution into a future characterized by creative, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for students" (Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 21). This emphasis on student learning brings together the following aspects of the model: mission, curriculum, resources, requirements, and outcomes. SACS defines student learning very broadly, and states that the QEP could address a wide range of topics or issues. SACS charges the institution's leadership team with control of all of the actions and activities necessary for the design, development, and

implementation of the QEP. The evaluation of the QEP and its acceptability will be determined by the On-Site Review Committee, and will be based upon the following indicators:

- 1. **Focus**. The institution identifies a significant issue(s) related to student learning and justifies it use for the Quality Enhancement Plan.
- 2. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation and Continuation of the Plan**. The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the Quality Enhancement Plan.
- 3. **Asessment of the Plan**. The institution demonstrates that it has the means for determining the success of its Quality Enhancement Plan.
- **Broad-Based Involvement of the Community**. The institution demonstrates that all aspects of its community were involved in the development of the Plan"

(Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, pg. 27).

Again, since the logic model is intended to be concise and to the point, it is important not to attempt to include too much information. Much of what has been stated above in the discussion of the QEP is for informational purposes only. It has been presented here to serve as justification for designing the logic model to indicate that SACS accreditation is predicated upon the proper and effective assemblage, collection, and presentation of data relative to two areas: the first is compliance with the SACS Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards, and the second is the SACS QEP requirements. If these are met, then SACS will confer their accreditation or reaccreditation. This is not to be interpreted as an implication that the above information is not important—it is just not essential to the model, which has the primary purpose of presenting a logical view of the total process of accreditation. The main premise here is that

anyone who is involved in any way with the accreditation or reaccreditation of their institution of higher learning must first understand and conceptualize the process in its entirety. This increased understanding and conceptualization of the many activities involved, their relationship to each other and to the process of accreditation, and their relative importance (not simply as individual activities and procedures, but as functional components of an important path of growth and improvement), will result in an institutional accreditation that generates real and verifiable benefits for all stakeholders.

The following logic model shows the SACS Accreditation Process as "riding" on the foundation, or "tracks" of data and evidence collection to demonstrate compliance with all of the SACS requirements and with the Quality Enhancement Plan. The necessary Inputs and Activities of Accreditation are shown in the center left of the model prior to the Compliance Activities, while the Outputs and Outcomes are shown to the right, after completion of the compliance activities, but prior to the Evaluation portion of the model. When the member institution has effectively negotiated and completed the activities necessary for a successful, positive evaluation to occur, the Commission on Colleges grants initial accreditation, if this is the first time in the process, or reaccreditation, if this is a renewal process. The major parts of the model and their relationships to each other are clearly identified. The individual accompanying activities listed below are not shown in the model itself, because of space limitations and the desire to keep the model as simple and direct as possible. It is recommended that these activities be included on a separate page that could accompany or be attached to the model.

Assumptions:

Institutional integrity Institutional mission Institutional authority

Legal status Continuous operation with students Financial stability

Compliance Activities:

Governance Administrative Procedures C E O and Board

Degree Requirements Program Length Recruiting Materials

Calendar and Policies Title IV HEA Accreditor Information Financial Stability

Quality Enhancement:

QEP/ QEP Development Institutional Effectiveness

Impact on Student Learning Effective Data Collection Impact Report

On-Site Review Committee

Inputs:

Curriculum Programs Faculty Degree Requirements

Library/Facilities Leadership Team QEP Development

Activities:

Faculty Student Affairs Financial Stability Curriculum

Complaints Culture of Integrity Reflected Mission

Increased Performance Levels Evidence/Documentation

Civic Accountability Leadership Team QEP Development

Outputs:

Achievement Licensing Job Placement

Assessment Activities Community Involvement Enhanced Quality

Student Learning

Outcomes:

Achievement Licensing Job Placement Enhanced Quality

Student Learning Increased Performance Levels

Evaluation:

Ongoing Procedures Data Collection Documentation Evidence

Evaluation of Evidence Compliance Certification Document

Report Preparation

Accreditation:

Compliance with all Requirements, Standards, Policies, and Procedures

Continuing/Ongoing Activity Data/Documentation

Evidence/Acceptable Evidence Requirements Peer Review

Off-Site Review Committee On-Site Review Committee

Report Preparation Review by Commission on Colleges

One final element of this SACS Logic Model must be discussed at this point. This element of the model arises because of the fact that not all of the outcomes and the outputs can be anticipated in advance and/or either planned for or accounted for in the design of the accreditation process. For that reason, the model allows for both "intended" and "unintended" Outcomes and Outputs. According to Butler Shaffer, a professor at The Southwestern University School of Law, "People who may mean well promote and enact measures that produce results they neither intended nor anticipated. The explanation for this discrepancy between what is planned for and what results can be found in the study of *chaos*, or *complexity.* The ability to predict outcomes is dependent upon an awareness of *all* factors influencing events. With complex systems, however, such complete knowledge is always unobtainable, meaning that there will always be information loss that will produce unforeseen consequences. This distortion increases with the passage of time" (Shaffer, Butler, 2003). Certainly the accreditation process, with all of the different participants and required activities, qualifies as a complex system—one

for which it would be nearly impossible to be aware of all influencing factors or to predict all possible outcomes. For this reason, it seems wise to allow room in the model for not only the expected outcomes of the accreditation process, but additionally to allow for the collection of information that would be helpful in analyzing the unintended or unforeseen outcomes or results of the institutions actions and activities regarding student learning and compliance with SACS requirements. These unintended outcomes and outputs could be either desirable or not. If desirable, then understanding what occurred and why would be extremely helpful for future presentation. If undesirable, then active steps could be taken to ensure as much as possible that these outcomes are not repeated.

The resulting SACS Accreditation Logic Model is shown on the following page. This model, as detailed, helps to present a complete, concise, and clear picture of the required assumptions, actions and activities, and the processes involved in the completion of a SACS accreditation or reaccreditation. The accreditation Logic Model, as shown below, is an accurate representation of the SACS accreditation process on a general, introductory basis. It meets all of the measures that have been previously discussed as pertaining to logic models. The model below can serve many functions. These functions will be discussed more in Chapter 5.

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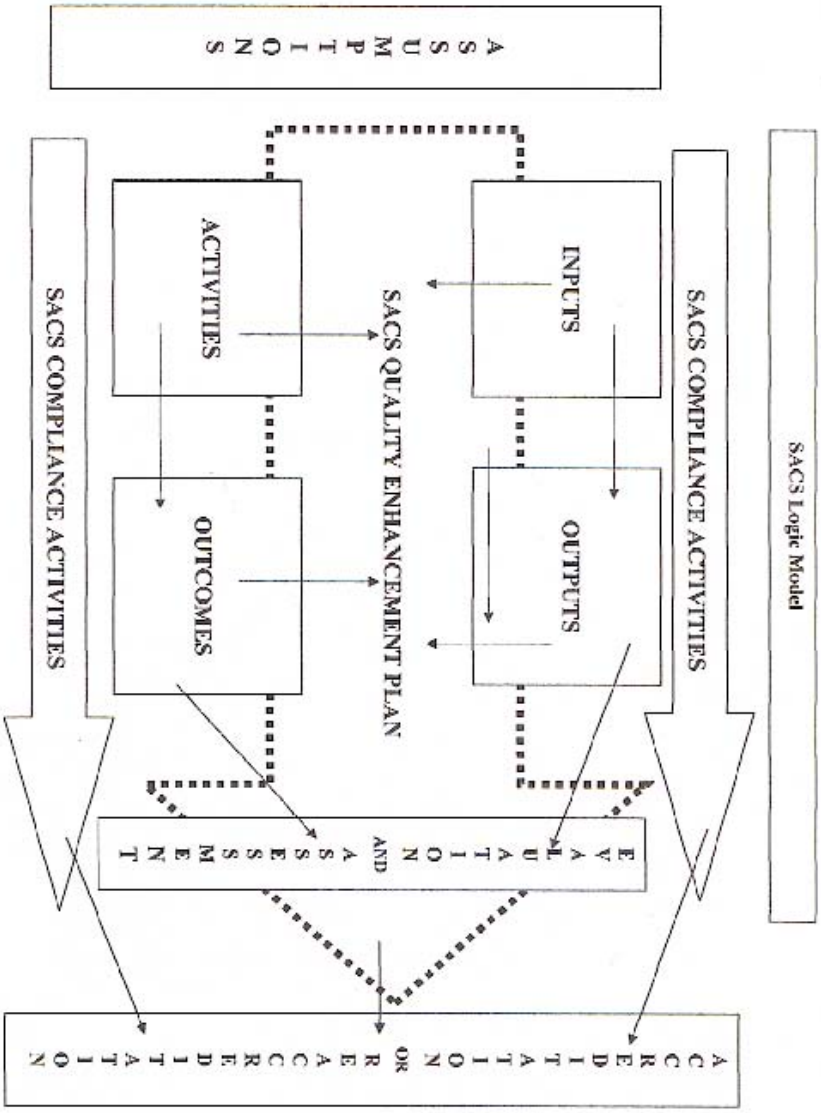
Figure 19: SACS Completed Logic Model



North Central Findings

Before proceeding any further into this analysis and comparison of the logic model derived for the North Central Region, it is important to make a very clear statement of intent. This is in no way intended to be a critique with the ultimate goal of stating that one region is in any way better than, or superior to, another region. There will always be personal preferences, personal likes and dislikes, and personal preconceptions that will come into play whenever conducting an analysis of two items. These can be based upon characteristics such as writing style, word choice, and perhaps even print decisions such as font and color combinations.

Also, before entering into a discussion of the North Central findings, another point, regardless of how obvious it might seem, needs to be brought out. The materials being analyzed were composed, written, designed, and produced by two completely different organizations. The members of the organizations do not necessarily espouse the same beliefs and feelings, and, even if they did so, they would not necessarily utilize identical words, expressions, and terminologies when verbalizing their instructions and directives. With these thoughts in mind, it would be wise not to expect to find a great deal of similarity in structure, composition, terminology, vocabulary, or even in the application of the accreditation processes that are found in the two regional accreditation organizations that make up this study. However, it is not unrealistic to expect to find some similarities of purpose, goals, intent, and methodology across the associations. The reason that this expectation is reasonable follows next.

It will be remembered that the initial pilot study compared documents from SACS with documents prepared by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, known as CRAC. The documents used in the pilot study were prepared as a result of a grant the Council received from the Pew Charitable Trust. This Council is made up of representatives from each of the six

regional accreditation associations. It is hard to find out a lot of information about the Council, including anything resembling a permanent geographic location or a mailing address. It appears to have been organized in January, 1998, as that is given as the original date that the By-Laws were approved. These By-Laws of the Council were obtained on the internet; a very brief synopsis of the purpose of the Council follows here. There are 11 stated purposes in the By-Laws; those most relative to the Council's being referenced in this work include: "Promote the improvement of higher education through the quality assurance processes [of] regional accreditation…Foster cooperation among the regional higher education accrediting commissions…Formulate and promote guidelines and best practices for the use by the regional accrediting commissions…Foster cooperation with other accrediting organizations in the United States…Serve as voice and advocate for regional accreditation…" (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, By-Laws, pg. 1). As these statements show, this Council is made up of representatives from the regional accreditation associations, and apparently speaks for these six associations as a whole, when appropriate or necessary. The important point to make here is that the stated purposes of this Council show that the accrediting associations intend to cooperate with each other, work together, and promote the improvement of higher education through the process of accreditation.

Having established this similarity of intent, it is time to move on to a discussion of the North Central document. The biggest difference between the SACS accreditation materials and the North Central accreditation materials is their organization and format. The North Central materials are all presented in one publication: Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition. This at once makes it easier in some respects and also harder in other respects. The task of searching for key words and key activities in the accreditation processes of the North Central Association is

easier to accomplish because there is only one document. The document is much longer, obviously, but because it is all available as one file, the initial electronic search for terminology is simplified. Additionally, because of the differences in the organization (four publications for SACS, and one publication for North Central) and presentation of the materials, it is harder to make many direct side by side comparisons between the publications of the two organizations.

Also, the North Central Association has recently undergone some major changes in the way it is organized, the way it operates, and the way in which it conducts its accreditation processes. "In 2001, the Commission launched the 'Restructuring Expectations: Accreditation 2004' initiative. The new accreditation program that emerged from this highly participative process was adopted by the Board in February 2003 for full implementation by January 2005. The new program includes significantly recast Criteria for Accreditation with embedded Core Components, a set of Eligibility Requirements for new applying organizations, and a set of Operational Indicators that will constitute the core of an affiliated organization's annual report to the Commission. This new edition of the Handbook of Accreditation introduces the new accreditation program" (*Handbook of Accreditation*, Third Edition, pg. 1.1-4).

Also in the preface, the Higher Learning Commission tells us that it has experienced many changes since 1998, and that there have been changes in their terminology. The following quotation, taken from the preface to the handbook, will illustrate:

> The Commission has a new mission statement, a new name, new legal status, new decision-making structures, and a new corporate logo. It has enhanced its programs and services through new Criteria, a new candidacy program, and a new team report format. In addition, it introduced a second program for maintaining accredited status—the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)—and

> created a new identity for the traditional approach—the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ). Consultant-evaluators, the heart of the Commission's evaluation processes, are now part of a larger corps of peer reviewers. Effective peer review is fundamental to the success of both PEAQ and AQIP, and the *Handbook* provides information on how the Commission strives to ensure the integrity of its peer reviewers and the processes in which they participate. Colleges and universities are currently changing more rapidly than they have in decades. To be effective in this changing environment, accreditation must be responsive while maintaining its capacity to provide credible quality assurance. The new Criteria for Accreditation, AQIP, customized processes in PEAQ, and the Commission's approach to institutional change are all intended to create an environment of self-regulation, to honor the distinctiveness of each affiliated organization, and to assure that the public is well-served by the organizations the Commission accredits.
>
> (*Handbook of Accreditation*, pg. *v*.).

As indicated above, a great deal of change has recently taken place in terminology and, perhaps more importantly, in the design and implementation of the processes for achieving and maintaining accredited status in the North Central Region. The preface goes on to say that even the accreditation handbook has been designed so that it can be modified and updated quickly—especially in these rapidly changing times. It was not surprising, therefore, that a search for key words, especially when beginning with the same list that was used in the initial examination of SACS, revealed the existence of differences and variations between SACS and North Central. As anticipated, the examination revealed not only a difference in the actual key words that were

found, but also a variance in the frequency of those words in the text. It became necessary at this point to make certain that there was a very clear understanding of the objectives of the North Central Accreditation process, and the directives, meaning and intent of North Central when it comes to identifying quality and providing evidence to substantiate institutional claims. This phase of the study was not conducted to determine any specific steps or exact procedural requirements, but more simply to establish the underlying theory, philosophy, organizational perspective the North Central Association was presenting in its publication. The result was that the basic philosophies and the intent of the accreditation process in North Central appeared to be very similar to that found in SACS. Since the focus, the goals, and the intent of the accreditation process, regardless of the region or association, is presented by the six regional associations as being comparable, it was important to be able to validate this position before continuing with the study of North Central.

With the similarities of the SACS and the North Central processes established, it now becomes more a matter of determining which of the different words used in the two regions' publications is suitable for comparison purposes. If one can accept the fact that the two regions included in this study both have the same aims, goals, and intended effects on higher education, then it becomes more a matter of determining which words, or symbols, are utilized and presented in similar capacities. Once again, this situation required the application of higher level cognitive skills. For the sake of uniformity, the same original list of 164 words utilized in examining the SACS documents was used to examine North Central handbook. Since this list is quite large and difficult to work with, it also needs to be reduced. The goal of this reduction process, as with the SACS model, was to create a list that reflects the major underlying philosophical qualities and the most important activities that the accreditation process envelops

and depends upon to produce the desired results. The intention was that this final list would be comprised of words that would be as reflective as possible of all of the activities, processes, and major features found in the documents of the North Central accreditation process. With the aid of a thesaurus in order to identify those remaining words having a nearly similar meaning and intent within the accreditation process, this series of consolidations resulted in a list of nine major key words. This list is shown in the following table in Figure 20.

The intent during the reduction process was to select as key those words that would imply similar actions, or similar requirements, or have similar effects on the application of the accreditation process. Again, this word choice is not intended to be definitive. Different readers have different perspectives, and different preferences. Another list prepared by a different individual would in all probability be somewhat different. The main point is that words are symbols that are used in the communication of thoughts and ideas. Many words that were found in this examination, when looked at with the assistance of a thesaurus, were found to have similar alternatives, and therefore similar meanings and intent. The one absolute necessity in the completion of the North Central Logic Model, just as it was in the completion of the SACS Logic Model, is that the model should convey, as directly and accurately as possible, the underlying theories, intent, and philosophy of the North Central Association. If another word could have been used to convey a section or a portion of the model, then so be it. The important aspect is that the resulting model is not fundamentally different or fundamentally changed because of the use of this different word or term. It is important to understand that no words have been used for convenience or for the ease of the researcher. No attempt has been made to misconstrue either of the regional associations' processes by selecting particular words. The SACS key words were identified in order to determine how they interrelated and interacted

within the accreditation materials published by SACS. The North Central key words were identified for the same purpose. They are not shown in the table beside the SACS key words for comparison purposes; they are simply shown so that it can be seen that the accreditation processes of the two regions are, indeed, similar in their goals, objectives, and intended effects. The word count is presented for the sole purpose of showing that the selected words were used in the documents in sufficient numbers to warrant their inclusion in the final list. Note that there are two additional words shown in parentheses under the SACS side of the table that were not included in the initial SACS key word listing or model. Again, this comparison is presented simply for the purpose of showing that there is, in fact, similarity between the SACS accreditation processes and the North Central accreditation processes, and therefore a logic model comparison is in order.

Figure 20: SACS Keywords Compared with North Central Keywords

SACS		NORTH CENTRAL	
Key Word	**Times Found**	**Key Word**	**Times Found**
Mission	366	Mission	218
Requirements	130	Criteria	265
Resources	142	Resources	73
Compliance	460	Evidence, Reports	204
Outcomes	86	Results	117
Standards	146	Quality	154
Curriculum	56	Program	349
(Effective[ness])	(81)	Effective[ness]	244
(Change, Improvements)	(131)	Change, Improvements	412

In their own words, the focus of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is found in their mission statement: "Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning" (Handbook of Accreditation, Third Ed. pg. 1.1-2). The Commission on Higher Learning sees itself as guiding its member institutions into the future in a rapidly changing environment. Indeed, the words "future" and

"future-oriented organization" are to be found seventy-six times in this handbook. The Commission believes, as does SACS in the concept of "Peer Review", as indicated in the following: "Although in recent years accrediting associations are implementing unique processes, they continue to rely on institutional self evaluation, peer review, and institutional response as essential to sound accreditation practice" (Handbook of Accreditation, pg.1.1-1).

While the organization and presentation of its methods and procedures are somewhat different from those found in SACS, the North Central Association still bases its accreditation activities around what they refer to as The Criteria for Accreditation. They present each of the five criteria as a statement, followed by the criterion's core components, and completed with examples of evidence. The North Central Criteria for Accreditation are presented below. In the interest of keeping this information as simple as possible, the criterion will be stated in its entirety, and the key words found in the core components will be indicated with **bold text**. These key words and concepts will then be included in the model, as was done with the SACS model.

- Criterion #1: Mission, Integrity: The organization operates with **integrity** to ensure the fulfillment of its **mission** through structures and processes that involve the **board**, **administration**, **faculty**, **staff**, and students.
  - Clear, articulate commitments
  - Recognition of **diversity**
  - Understanding and support pervade the institution
  - **Governance** and **administration** promote **effective leadership**/processes
  - Organization upholds and protects its **integrity**

oCriterion # 2: Preparation for Future: The organization's allocation of **resources** for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to **future** challenges and opportunities.

***** Realistically prepare for the future

* **Resources** support educational **programs** and plans for future **strength** and maintenance

* Ongoing **evaluation** and **assessment** provide reliable evidence of effectiveness with **strategies** for continuous improvement

* All **planning** aligns with mission to enhance the capacity for fulfillment

oCriterion # 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching: The organization provides **evidence** of **student learning** and **teaching effectiveness** that demonstrates it is fulfilling it educational mission.

***** Clearly stated **goals** for each program facilitating **effective assessment**

* Value and support of effective teaching

* Creation of **effective learning environments**

* **Resource** support student learning and **effective teaching**

oCriterion # 4: Acquisition, Discovery and Application of Knowledge: The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting **inquiry**, **creativity**, **practice**, and **social responsibility** in ways consistent with its mission.

***** Board, administrators, faculty, students, and staff demonstrate a value of learning

* Demonstrate that acquisition of **broad knowledge** and **skills**, and intellectual **curiosity** are integral to its programs

* Assess **curricula** in light of a global, diverse, and technological society

* Support faculty, students, and staff in the **acquisition**, **discovery**, and **application** of knowledge

oCriterion # 5: Engagement and Service: As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its **constituencies** and serves them in ways both value.

***** Learn from constituencies it serves and analyze its capacity to meet their **needs** and **expectations**.

* Organization has **capacity** and **commitment** to engage constituencies and communities

* Organization is responsive to its dependent constituencies

* **Internal** and **external** constituencies value the organization's services

By looking at these five core components and examining both the activities involved and the key words that are utilized in the discussion of the requirements for accreditation, the picture of the accreditation model is beginning to take shape. It is not unlike the SACS model as far as its component parts, as is indicated by the highlighted words above. Though stated in a different format as to the number of core requirements, the similarity to SACS accreditation is apparent. It can be seen that in the North Central Association, the institution's actions and activities with regard to accreditation criteria, needs (its own and those of its constituencies), its mission, its resources, its results, its programs, its quality (of teaching and learning), its effectiveness (in both teaching and learning), (its ability to) change (and bring about improvements), and, finally, the evidence it gathers and provides to the Higher Learning Commission all come together and

interact and interplay in the North Central accreditation process. The application of the accreditation process and the choices that an institution can make with regard to meeting the requirements for accreditation are somewhat different from those of SACS.

Before moving further into the accreditation process in North Central, one additional point should be brought out her. It might be questioned as to why this information about North Central is not being presented in as similar a format as possible to the information that was presented for SACS. By the time this North Central information is collected into its final form for inclusion in the model, it will be in a similar form. Initially, this data is being extracted and assembled in a somewhat different manner. This is because each association is so unique in the way it presents itself and its accreditation requirements to its membership, and also in the way it composes, assembles, and explains said details in its handbooks and publications. Also, an additional point should be made here regarding this North Central data. There was reference in an earlier quotation from their handbook to "core components," "eligibility requirements," and "operational indicators." The use of this quotation could have mistakenly given rise to the expectation that this would lead to the construction of a three columned chart for the North Central Association also. That is not the case. The "eligibility requirements" concern whether or not an organization is eligible for membership, and, if so, for what type of membership, in the North Central Association. Though important, they do not enter into the accreditation model being developed here. More will be said about this later with reference to one of the optional accreditation paths that are available to member organizations of North Central.

The "**operational indicators**," while they are extremely important in the accreditation process, seem to play more of a side role in the overall examination of an organization during its accreditation/reaccreditation process. As such, while they are a component of the accreditation

model, they are not considered here to be a major category of information that is necessary for the construction of the North Central Accreditation model. These "operational indicators" come from an annual report that is filed annually by every organization member of the North Central Association. "This report, which is completed online, provides the Commission with up-to-date information on the scope of activities of each affiliated organization and sufficient information to understand and respond to significant shifts in an organization's capacity and/or scope of educational activities" (Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 7.1-3). The major groupings of information that are included in this report include: Demographics, Educational Programs, Financial Strength, and Scope of Activities. The annual pictures of the member organizations are utilized as a source of information concerning an organization's pending accreditation or reaccreditation. Prior to any action regarding an organization's accreditation or reaccreditation, the Commission will provide copies of the reports that have been submitted over the years to members of the various visiting teams or reviewers who will play a role in the activities. Since the operational indicators represent one segment of the requirements that an organization must meet as a condition of obtaining North Central accreditation they will be included in the model, but are going to be placed in the "Assumptions" portion. This is being done to keep the resulting model as simple yet as clear and concise as possible—as that, after all, is one of the intended characteristics of a logic model. The important thing is that this proposed model for North Central be as true and representative a presentation as possible of the North Central Association's accreditation procedures and processes.

Reference was made earlier to the fact that the actual accreditation process in the North Central Association was somewhat different from that found in SACS. Member organizations of North Central now have the option of choosing one of two available methods for maintaining

their accredited status. These two options are: Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ). While both of these options are similar in that their ultimate focus is accreditation, they are very different processes. These two processes will be described and discussed next. As with the Criteria for Accreditation, key words and concepts to be included in the model will also be highlighted.

Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ)

This program "…on the surface may appear simply to be traditional accreditation renamed" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 5.1-1). This program contains the typical accreditation components of self-study, **peer review**, accreditation decision by the Commission, and institutional response (if any). If no changes are made to the process, it would indeed be much like the traditional accreditation process. This process is different in that the organization preparing to undergo a **self-study** process could, if it so chooses, apply for a change request. The application for a change request transforms this into a **customized accreditation review process**. The organization requests authorization to focus its self study not only on its accreditation but also on issues that it selects as being important to its continued growth and improvement. During the on-site accreditation review "The Commission sends an **evaluation team** to the organization not only to address assurance issues associated with accreditation review but also to spend considerable time in a consultative role related to the previously agreed-upon **special emphasis foci**" (Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 5.3-2). Since the organization undergoing the accreditation process can choose the customized approach, the two choices, PEAQ and PEAQ-c (researcher's choice as designated titles) will be included in the model.

Regardless of whether a customized approach is requested by an organization, the PEAQ contains all of the typical requirements of the accreditation process: An effective self study must be designed, communicated and carried out within the organization; good, valid and reliable **data** must be gathered, assembled, and assimilated into the various required **evidential components** of **reports**, and filings; there must be good administrative and faculty leadership in the organization; there must be **good communication** and **coordination of activities** across the organization; and there must be a **wide level of commitment** and support to the accreditation process—and to the **pursuit of improvement** if a customized review process is requested—within the entire organization.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)

The Academic Quality Improvement Program is a method of achieving accredited status within the North Central Association that is at the same time very unique, highly creative, and challenging. "AQIP's Principles of High Performance Organizations describe the characteristics participating colleges and universities strive to imbed within their culture. Research and experience indicate that these principles—**Focus**, **Involvement**, **Leadership**, **Learning**, **People**, **Collaboration**, **Agility**, **Foresight**, **Information**, and **Integrity**—permeate organizations that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. These qualities underlie all of AQIP's criteria, activities, processes, and services, and they represent the values to which AQIP itself aspires organizationally" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.1-1).

In the words of the North Central Commission, the AQIP option has a time line and functions in a manner similar to the accreditation process: "When a college or university formally becomes a Participant in AQIP, the date of its next reaffirmation of accreditation is set

seven years from the date of the official action admitting the organization to AQIP. Reaffirmation seven years later is based on the pattern of **full participation** in AQIP during that period, on **evidence of progress** and **improvement in the organization**, and on **evidence** that the organization continues to fulfill the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.1-2).

Initially, the AQIP process could be viewed as being somewhat similar to the customized PEAQ approach because the customized PEAQ option allows an institution to focus on selected issues or areas as a portion of its accreditation requirements. The AQIP option is similar, but only in the sense that the organization requesting AQIP must begin to think of itself in terms of continual movement toward improvement. It is available to member organizations as an accreditation approach in a manner similar to the PEAQ option. The organization wishing to participate in AQIP must formally apply to the Higher Learning Commission. The application is available online. Once an organization is accepted into AQIP, though, the actual process of accreditation operates differently. "An **AQIP Review Panel** of educational and quality experts evaluates the application and forwards a consensus recommendation to the Commission's Institutional Actions Council (IAC). The executive director sends the organization a letter announcing the Commission's action. When an organization is accepted into AQIP, the entire AQIP staff serves as it primary link with the Commission for all matters" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.1-2).

It can be seen that the Criteria for Accreditation are still an important part of the process. The organization utilizing this approach must still furnish evidence that they are meeting these criteria that have been established by North Central. Additionally, their accreditation is based upon the demonstration, by meeting the requirements of AQIP, of continued progress and

improvement during the period since the last accreditation or reaccreditation. North Central describes their AQIP as "Systems Thinking in the Process-Focused Organization" (Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.2-1). In explaining exactly what they mean by this, the handbook continues: "AQIP is characterized by its concentration on systems and processes both as the basis for quality assurance and as leverage for institutional improvement. To ensure that its participant organizations maintain this process focus, AQIP crated nine criteria that pose challenging questions about groups of related processes. Although the AQIP Criteria examine an organization from a perspective different from the lens used in the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation, they ultimately permit an institution to create a body of evidence that will allow easy proof that it fulfills the Commission's Criteria" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.2-1). The handbook goes on to explain and show, in chart form, how each of the nine AQIP Criteria relate to the five Criteria for Accreditation. Presented below in Figure 21 are the nine AQIP Criteria and each of the Criteria for Accreditation to which the Commission denotes a relationship.

Figure 21: AQIP Criteria with Related Criteria for Accreditation

AQIP CRITERIA	RELATED CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION
1. Helping **Students Learn**	1, 3, 4
2. **Accomplishing** Other Distinct **Objectives**	1, 4, 5
3. **Understanding** Students' and Other Stakeholders' **Needs**	1, 3, 4
4. **Valuing People**	2, 4, 5
5. **Leading** and **Communicating**	1, 3, 5

6. Supporting **Institutional Operations**	2, 3, 4
7. **Measuring Effectiveness**	2, 3, 5
8. **Planning Continuous Improvement**	1,2
9. Building **Collaborative Relationships**	2,5

A word is in order here explaining why so much detail of the AQIP option has been included when much less detail for PEAQ has been presented in this analysis. The simple explanation is that the PEAQ is an accreditation option that, in the Commission's own words, could appear to be the traditional accreditation renamed. In that regard, it does not differ in its scope or in its processes and goals from what has been considered to be a "typical" accreditation process. The Commission states the following in the Handbook: "To maintain their accredited status, all Commission-accredited colleges and universities must meet identical requirements: file an Annual Report on Organizational Information and Operational Indicators, follow the Commission's Institutional change procedures, keep current on dues, and demonstrate they meet the Criteria for Accreditation. While the processes for maintaining accredited status differ in AQIP from those used in PEAQ, the fundamental requirements remain the same" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.2-2). With the AQIP, the Commission detailed nine additional Criteria and presented them with nine sets of questions to detail and explain their intent. This information, then, relates directly to the AQIP process. "Because each of the nine AQIP Criteria examines a category of processes vital to every college or university, the nine categories together are comprehensive, covering all of the key processes and goals found in any higher education organization. The AQIP Criteria's comprehensive nature and specific questions about processes, results, and improvement allow each organization to fully describe its activities

and accomplishments while analyzing itself in a way that promotes critical and productive thinking about improvement" (Handbook for Accreditation, Third Edition, pg. 6.2-2). These AQIP Criteria, which the chart above chart relates to the five Criteria for Accreditation, are specific to the processes and systems that are, in effect, demanded by an organization's choice to pursue accreditation along this path.

Just as there were two options available to organizations selecting the PEAQ approach, there are also two options available to organizations applying for the AQIP process. However, there is one very important difference. The alternative AQIP process is available to those organizations which, for whatever reason, are not eligible for North Central accreditation. This lack of eligibility is not to be construed as a negative mark on such an organization. This situation could exist for a division or a school of an organization that is not applying for accreditation on an organization-wide basis, or the fact that an organization is not located within the geographical region encompassed by the North Central Association. At any rate, the option is available for an organization to choose AQIP without accreditation. This option is mentioned here so that it is not thought to have been overlooked or left out. It will be included in the model as an available option because it is important enough to the North Central Association to have been designed and included in their approach. According to North Central, this approach requires the same level of commitment and involvement in the AQIP process as it would from an organization seeking accreditation. However, since it does not lead to accreditation by North Central, it is not shown with a direct connection to accreditation.

At this time it is appropriate to begin to assemble the North Central Logic Model. Once again, it should not be expected that all nine of the key words will be found as major categories or portions of the model. To repeat what was stated previously in Chapter 3: While all of these

key words should represent activities and requirements that are found or represented in the completed logic model, it is not necessary that they be the major names used in the model. Logic modeling requires that you link the broad categories of assumptions, resources, inputs, activities, results, outcomes, and impact into a cohesive visual aid that conveys as clearly and concisely as possible the philosophy, goals, methods, and intended results of the program or process that is being reviewed. In this case, that process is Accreditation, so accreditation related terms should be found in the model, but not control the model. The major portions or categories of the North Central Logic Model are as follows in Figure 22:

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<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Figure 22: NORTH CENTRAL ACCREDITATION MODEL</th></tr>
<tr><td>Assumptions
Mission, Integrity, Resources, Operational Indicators, Institution-Wide Commitments,</td><td>Evidence, Reports
Resources, Effective Learning Environments, Clear Goals, Data Collection, Assess Curricula,</td><td rowspan="4">PEAQ
Self Study, Peer Review, Evaluation Team, Data, Evidence, Reports, Institutional Response, Pursuit of Improvement

PEAQ-c
All of the above plus a Change Request, Customized Accreditation Review Process, Evaluation Team Consultative Role, Special Emphasis Foci,</td><td rowspan="4">AQIP
Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Student Learning, Valuing People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, Integrity, Distinct Objectives, Institutional Operations, Measuring Effectiveness, Continuous Improvement, Collaborative Relationships AQIP Review Panel,</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inputs
Administration, Faculty, Staff, Students, Effective Teaching, Effective Leadership, Internal/External Constituencies,</td><td>Activities
Board, Administration, Governance, Leadership, Recognize Diversity, Data Collection, Effective Teaching, Assess Curricula, Good Communication, Good Coordination, Meet Constituencies' Needs/Expectations, Social Responsibility,</td></tr>
<tr><td>Outcomes
Knowledge Acquisition, Knowledge Discovery, Knowledge Application,</td><td>Outputs
Student Learning, Broad Knowledge/Skills, Intellectual Curiosity, Service, Planning for Future,</td></tr>
<tr><td>Evaluation
Recognize Diversity, Look toward Future, Strategies, Ongoing Evaluation and Assessment, Data Collection,</td><td>Accreditation
Planning, Ongoing Evaluation and Assessment, Data Collection, Continued Growth & Improvement</td></tr>
</table>

The necessary and critical information relative to the North Central Accreditation processes is collected into the above chart. An inspection of the items found in each of the nine classifications will show that there is some overlap of actions, activities, and elements of the North Central accreditation process. This overlap exists for a number of reasons, but at least two come immediately to mind. The first reason is that the accreditation process requires the

collection of data and evidence from virtually every area and activity that exists across the entire institution. The second is that The North Central Association has "reduced" the Criteria for Accreditation to five in number. These five Criteria are broad and sweeping, and therefore should generate interrelated actions, activities, and processes. An examination of the Critical Statements, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence that are presented with each of the five Criteria shows, by the use of key words, and subsequent wording describing the actions and activities of the process, that this is the case across the entire North Central Accreditation process. This terminology and activity duplication applies largely to the important model areas affecting teaching, student learning, communication, data collection, and effective organizational practices, and is to be expected across the North Central Accreditation process. This duplication and reiteration is mentioned here for the benefit of those who might wish to see less of it in the model. It might, indeed, be possible to eliminate some duplication in some categories in the model, but not across the entire process. This is a personal matter, and not one that would or should have any effect upon the resulting logic model.

The completed North Central Logic Model is shown below in Figure 23.

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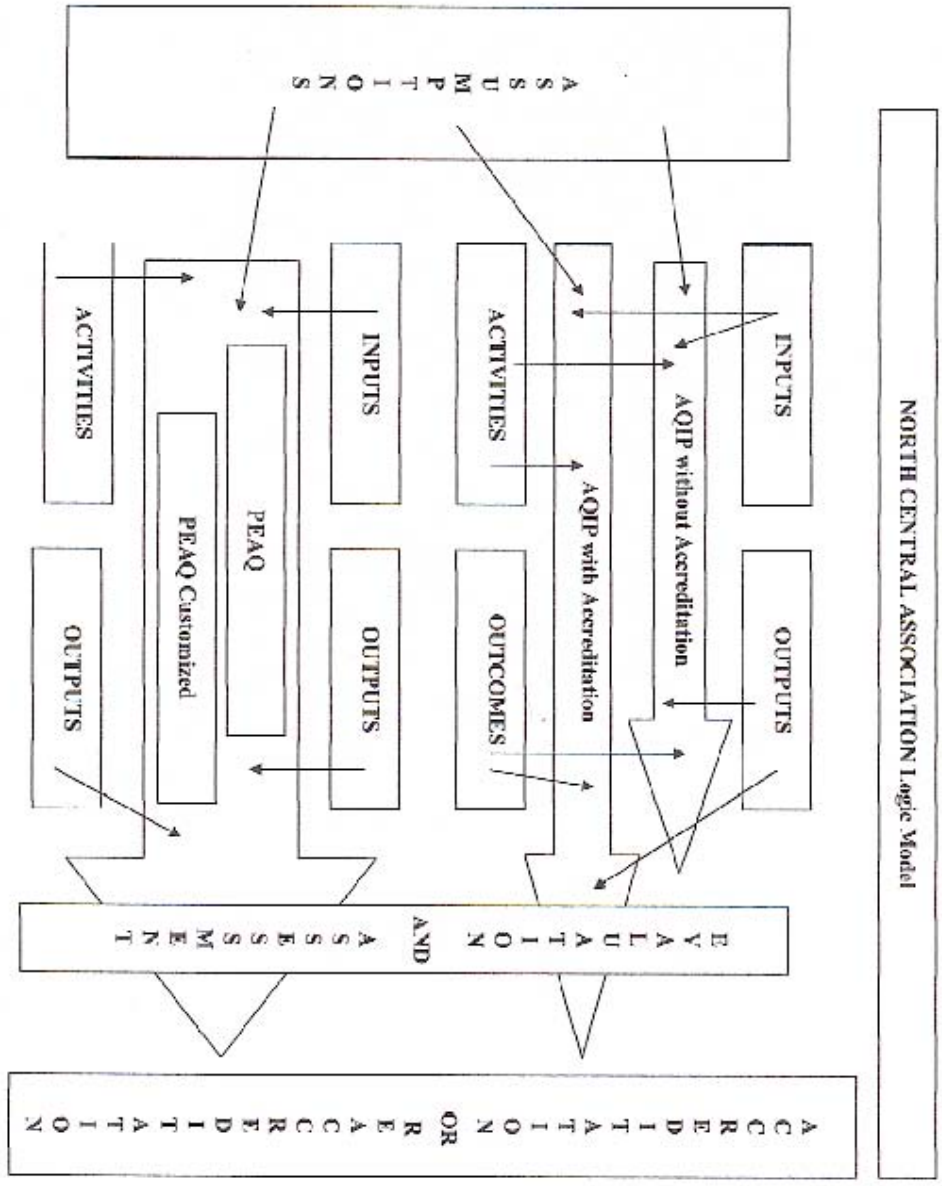
Figure 23: Completed North Central Logic Model



The above logic model begins with the basic assumptions that must be made relative to the accreditation process being examined. In this case the assumptions are based on the North

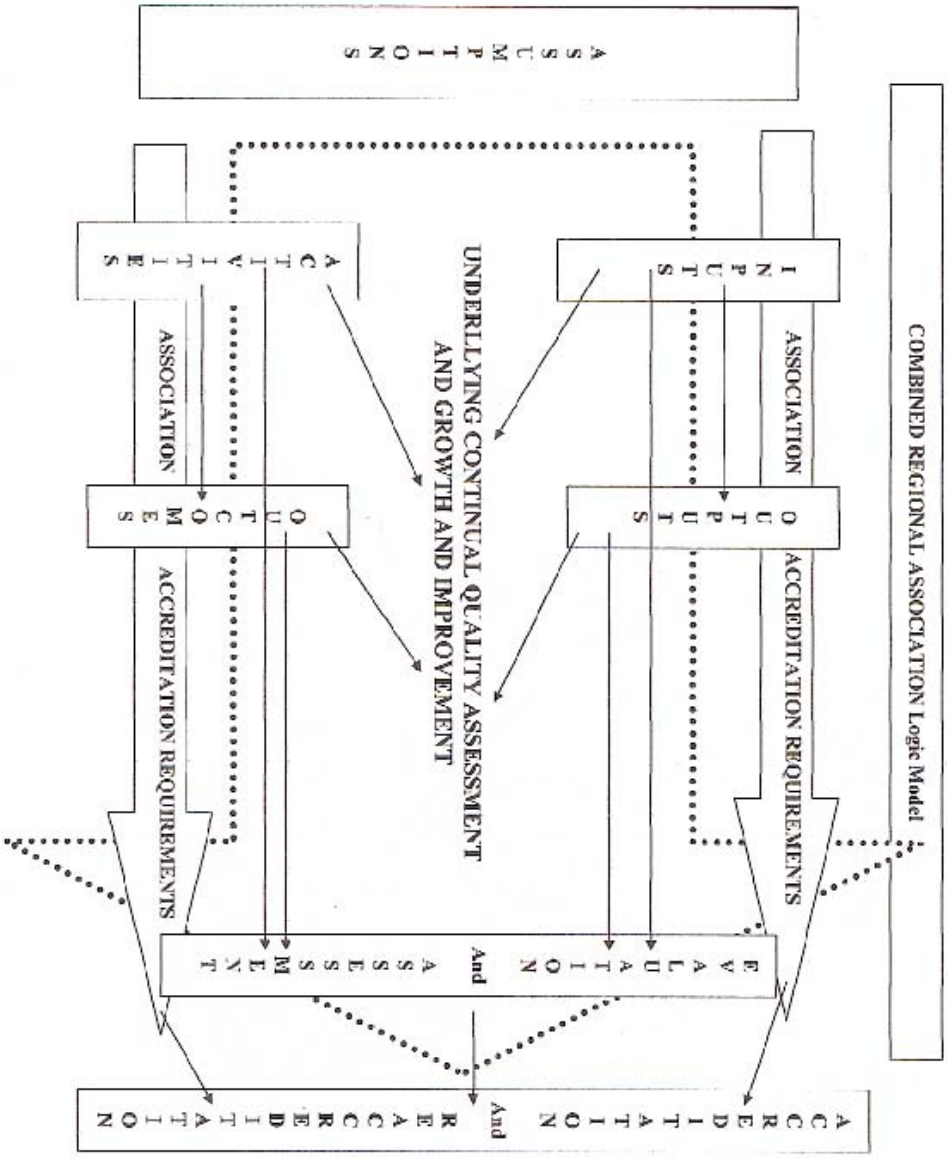
Central Association's stated membership requirements, organizational requirements, operational indicators, and other stipulated regulations. At this point, the model allows for the organization's choice of accreditation process. In this case, the two choices are PEAQ or AQIP. In the case of PEAQ, the process allows for the choice of the standard process or the customized process. Both choices lead to accreditation, and, while there is a difference in the steps of the process, there is no difference in the results achieved. For that reason, the PEAQ and the PEAQ-c are shown as two options within the one framework. The AQIP also has two options available. These two choices available within the AQIP process, on the other hand, lead to different ends. For that reason, each of the AQIP processes is shown as being independent of the other. In addition, one of the processes leads to accreditation, and the other choice does not lead to accreditation, as indicated by the fact that the AQIP without Accreditation arrow does not reach the Accreditation portion of the model. The logic model shows that each of the two paths, PEAQ or AQIP, requires its own data and information relative to Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes. At the far right of the model are the evaluation and assessment activities. These activities are required both for the organization to ultimately achieve accreditation or reaccreditation, and for the organization to demonstrate to itself and to others that it is achieving growth, change, or improvement within its educational activities.

Combined / Unified Logic Model

With the completion of both the SACS and the North Central logic models, it is now possible to attempt to construct a combined or unified logic model. As expected, there are differences in the accreditation process available to SACS member institutions and that process available to North Central organizations. These differences have more to do with the stated requirements and detailed steps involved in each of the processes studied, and not with the

expected results of the accreditation process in each region. As expected, the words used, the key words found, the number of and wording of the accreditation criteria itemized, and the steps and methods employed by each region in determining the accreditation status of its membership revealed differences between the two regions. However, the stated goals of each region's process are highly comparable. In both regions, the accreditation process is designed to show that an institution/organization meets certain standards with respect to its mission, its administrative operation, its academic functions, its financial health, its commitments to its stakeholders/constituencies, and its dealings with and for its students. The goal of each of the processes investigated is to determine quality, effectiveness, responsibility, and commitment on the part of the member institutions/organizations. While the actual, detailed steps involved in each of the accreditation processes are somewhat different, the underlying logical foundation, the essential methodology, and the overall stated goals are similar enough to warrant an attempt at constructing a logic model that could be applicable to both the SACS accreditation process and to the North Central accreditation process. There is enough similarity in the key components of the logic model detailed for each region that the one modification thought to be necessary to incorporate in proposing a unified model was a method for accommodating the differences between SACS's "Quality Enhancement Plan and North Central's "PEAQ/AQIP Quality Components". That has been accomplished by designing the Unified Logic Model to be built upon an "Underlying Continual Quality Assessment and Growth and Improvement" component. In all other respects, the unified logic model has the same components and accompanying activities as each of the two individual regional association models. The model is shown below.

Figure 25: Combined / Unified Logic Model



The proposed model is general enough in its design to be able to apply to either of the regional associations upon which it is based. Though it could be questioned as to whether it applies, exactly as it is, to the specific choices available to member organizations in North Central region, it cannot be denied that the basic underlying quality assessment with continued growth and improvement is, in fact, relevant to the North Central accreditation process. Just as it does not specifically mention the "Quality Enhancement" aspect of the SACS model, it is still relevant enough to apply to either. It is possible that, should the development of a national accreditation logic model even be probable, this national model would serve a generalized function in the overall accreditation process. This generalized functional model could be followed by a model more specific to the actual region in question.

This brings to a close this discussion of the results. A logic model for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has been successfully created, as has a logic model for the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In addition, a unified/combined logic model based upon the study of the key words, philosophy, and processes found in both of the studied regions has been created and is proposed. That was the goal of and the purpose of this research and it has been accomplished.

Chapter Five

Summary

Accreditation has been, and still is, under fire from many interests who are dissatisfied with the state of the educational institutions in this country, ranging from primary through secondary and including higher education institutions. Accreditation is certainly not responsible for this situation that exists and the perceived problems regarding education in this country today. The reasons are certainly so complex and complicated that the fault or blame cannot be laid at the feet of one component or process. More importantly, the fact that there is dissatisfaction across the board and across all regions and educational districts shows that there are more factors and influences in operation behind the visible indicators that are the cause for the concerns. The blame cannot be laid at the feet of the accreditation organizations.

However, the regional accreditation associations, due to the fact that they present themselves and their purpose as promoting the advancement of quality in education, have come to be the focus of much frustration on the part of those dissatisfied constituencies. There are six regional accreditation associations, and each of them, based upon an in depth study of two associations for this research, approaches its processes of accreditation in a somewhat different and unique process from the others. This study investigated the process of accreditation as it is practiced and applied today and its possible representation as a logic model.

Purpose of Study

This study of logic modeling was proposed as one means of improving the understanding of and communication of the procedures involved in the application of the regional accreditation process. This study represents an attempt to approach the subject of improvement in regional

accreditation through the lens of the activity of logic modeling. The goal of the study was to see if the accreditation process could become more uniform and subsequently more effective overall.

Summary of Procedures

In order to use an accreditation logic model in any way, it would first be necessary to construct one, since none exist at present for any of the regional accreditation associations. The first step was to determine whether or not it would be possible to construct a logic model of an existing regional association's accreditation process. Construction of one region's model "after the fact," so to speak, suggested that it might be possible to continue the process and construct a model for other regions' accreditation process.

This "after the fact process" involved the activities of searching accreditation association documents regarding their accreditation process to find key words, and thus develop a sense of what the particular association was projecting as relevant components of the accreditation experience. Once the appropriate key words were developed, the next step required developing the key relationships and interactions between not only the key words, but also the stated requirements for accreditation, including its methods and procedures. After completing this analysis, it would be possible to develop an understanding of the underlying philosophy of accreditation that the particular regional association implemented.

After developing the list of key words, developing the major relationships and interactions between these key words, developing the relationships and interactions between accreditation requirements and activities, and developing a sense of the underlying accreditation philosophy, the next step was to "fold" this information into the logic model format. This required the classification of the information into the basic logic model categories of

Assumptions, Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact. Once this was accomplished, the logic model for the particular regional accreditation association could be constructed.

Efforts to Address Limitations

An important limitation of this study, notably the lack of a significant number of accreditation research studies from which to conduct an effective search of the literature, could not be overcome. However, literature discussing accreditation offered insight into the significance of accreditation and an historical perspective of its evolution within higher education.

While investigating the various accreditation literature and reviewing the concerns for continuity in the application of the various models, the possibility of applying a logic model to accreditation emerged. This expanded the possible literature base such that the logic model information became the important critical framework, which led to the development of the pilot study and the methodology that was utilized in the study of the two regional associations.

This study was breaking new ground, both in the application of logic models to accreditation processes, and also in being a study of a subject and a process that, prior to this, had not generated a significant amount of research studies. Once this fact was established, the position was adopted that this research might be adding and contributing to an area of educational research that, quite simply, needed it.

Another limitation initially referred to as it applies to this study is the influence on the accreditation process of the "phenomenology" associated with the accreditation process. It is not possible to eliminate the fears, individual and institutional biases, prior personal "scars" and emotional experiences, and unwarranted expectations. However, with regard to the communication problems and data collection problems inherent in the accreditation process, it

has been pointed out that the logic model might be successfully used to, if not overcome these problems, at least help to minimize their effect on the overall application and results of regional accreditation.

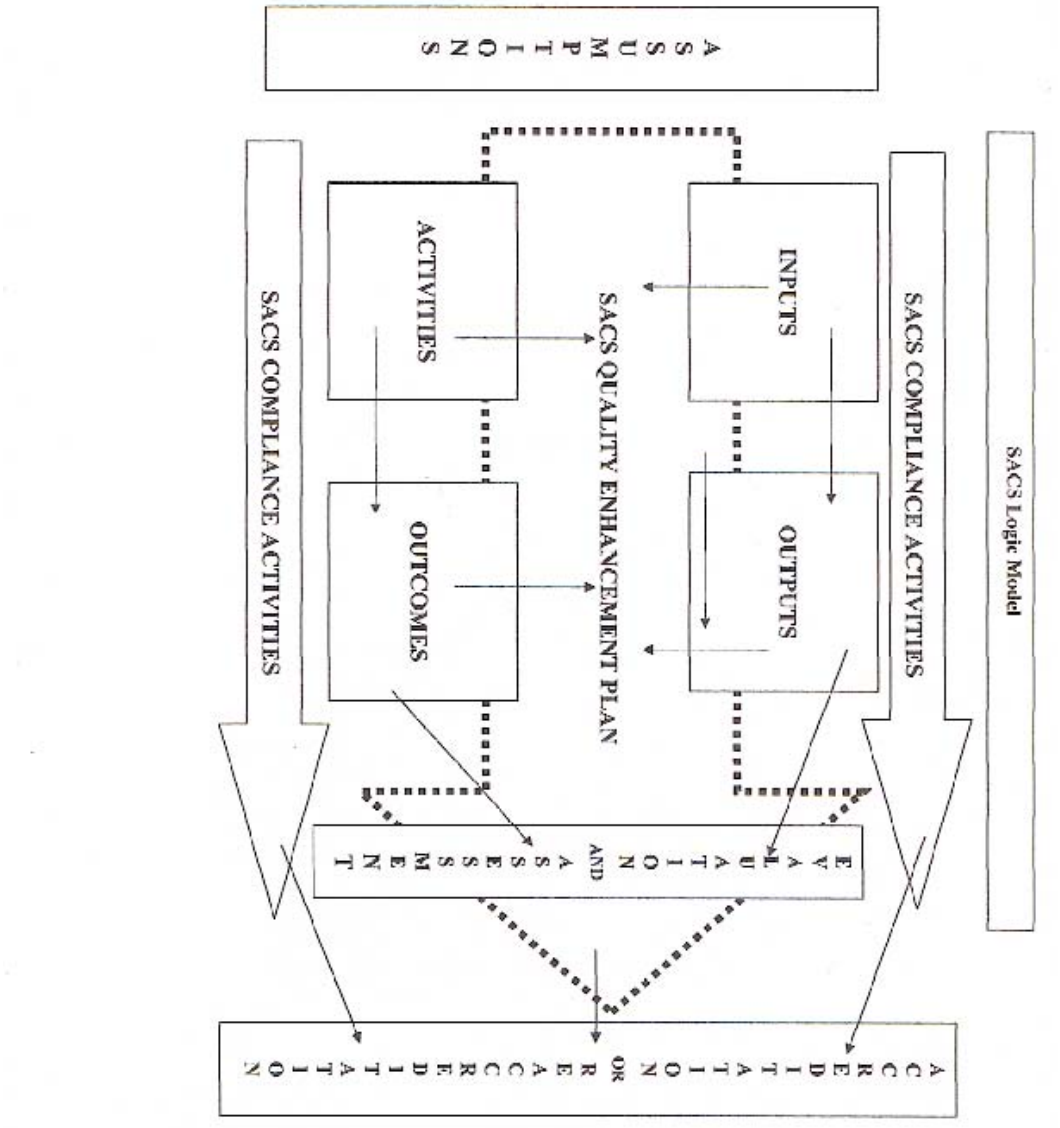
Findings

SACS Logic Model

The SACS model (Figure X) begins with assumptions and ends with the achievement of accreditation or reaccreditation. The assumptions, unique to the institution, are based upon its stated mission and goals, and upon the required compliance activities. Achieving the goal of accreditation requires meeting these SACS compliance activities and the presentation of evidence to show that the institution is operating an approved, ongoing "quality enhancement" plan that is unique to it and its mission. In SACS, the "Quality Enhancement Plan" is paramount, and therefore is represented as the underlying foundation of the accreditation model. SACS compliance activities, based upon their Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal requirements, are shown as directing the processes of data collection and presentation, and the institution's ongoing operations.

Inputs and Activities, based upon acceptable data and evidence, are shown as the first entries into the model. Outputs and Outcomes, again based upon acceptable data and evidence, are represented with direct relationships from the inputs and activities. The evaluation process (which is based upon an initial self study, demonstration of compliance with all SACS requirements, and an on-site team visit) is shown as a separate yet parallel step in the overall accreditation model. Upon completion of all requirements and the submission of the appropriate reports, a decision is made by SACS regarding the granting of accreditation or reaccreditation.

Figure 26: SACS Logic Model



North Central Logic Model

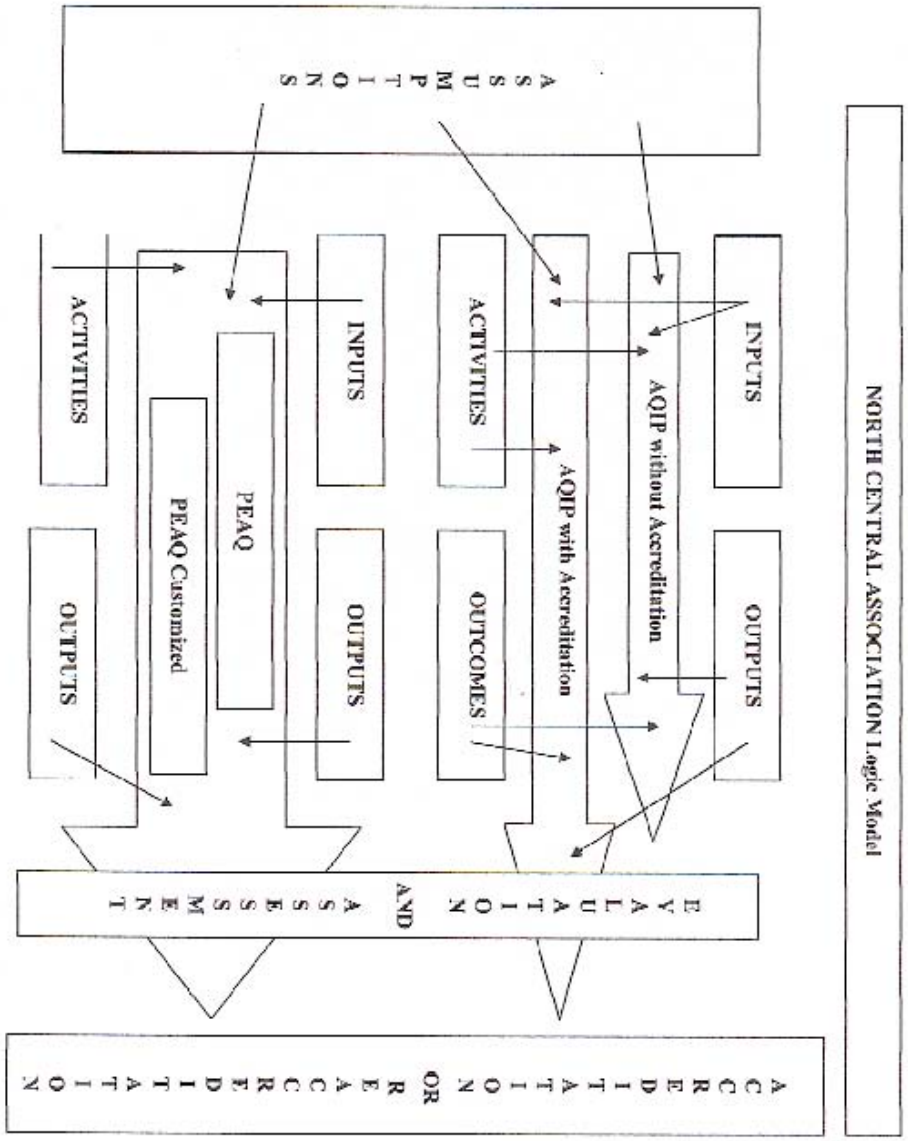
The North Central Model, as with the SACS model, begins with assumptions and ends with the achievement of accreditation or reaccreditation. The assumptions are unique to the

institution, and are based upon its stated mission and goals. The assumptions also include Operational Indicators. Within North Central there are two paths that an organization can follow that lead to accreditation: the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ), and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Both PEAQ and AQIP contain two choices, but only one choice within AQIP leads to accreditation.

PEAQ, the based upon the more traditional accreditation approach, allows for a choice between this traditional approach and an approach that, upon North Central approval, is customized for the particular organization. The customized approach allows the organization to focus on growth and improvement issues. AQIP, on the other hand, is a process under which the organization maintains its accreditation requirements, but focuses its energies on documenting and recording its efforts in a continual, ongoing process of growth, development, and improvement. This process, again, is unique to the organization, and essentially is comparable to the SACS "Quality Enhancement Plan." One AQIP process is for organizations wishing to achieve accreditation, and the other is for those organizations not eligible for accreditation.

Inputs and Activities relative to the path chosen by the organization, based upon acceptable data and evidence, are shown as the first entries into the model. Outputs and Outcomes relative to the chosen path, again based upon acceptable data and evidence, are identified as derivatives of the inputs and activities. The evaluation process (which is based on the path chosen and can also include elements of self study, demonstration of conformity with all North Central requirements, and an on-site team visits) is represented as a linear compliment and component in the overall accreditation model. Upon completion of all requirements and the submission of the appropriate reports, a decision is made by North Central regarding the granting of accreditation or reaccreditation.

Figure 27: North Central Logic Model



Combined / Unified Regional Logic Model

The Combined/Unified model, being a blend of the two regional association models, also begins with assumptions and ends with the achievement of accreditation or reaccreditation. This model represents the "Quality Enhancement"/"Continual Growth and Development" aspects of the particular regional accreditation process as an underlying feature of the process of achieving accreditation or reaccreditation. The side arrows represent the regional associations' standard accreditation requirements. The Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes—which are standard requirements of any logic model—are shown leading to the appropriate accreditation activities relative to quality and growth and evaluation. Successfully meeting the regional requirements and completing the evaluation activities results in the achievement of accreditation or reaccreditation from the respective regional association.

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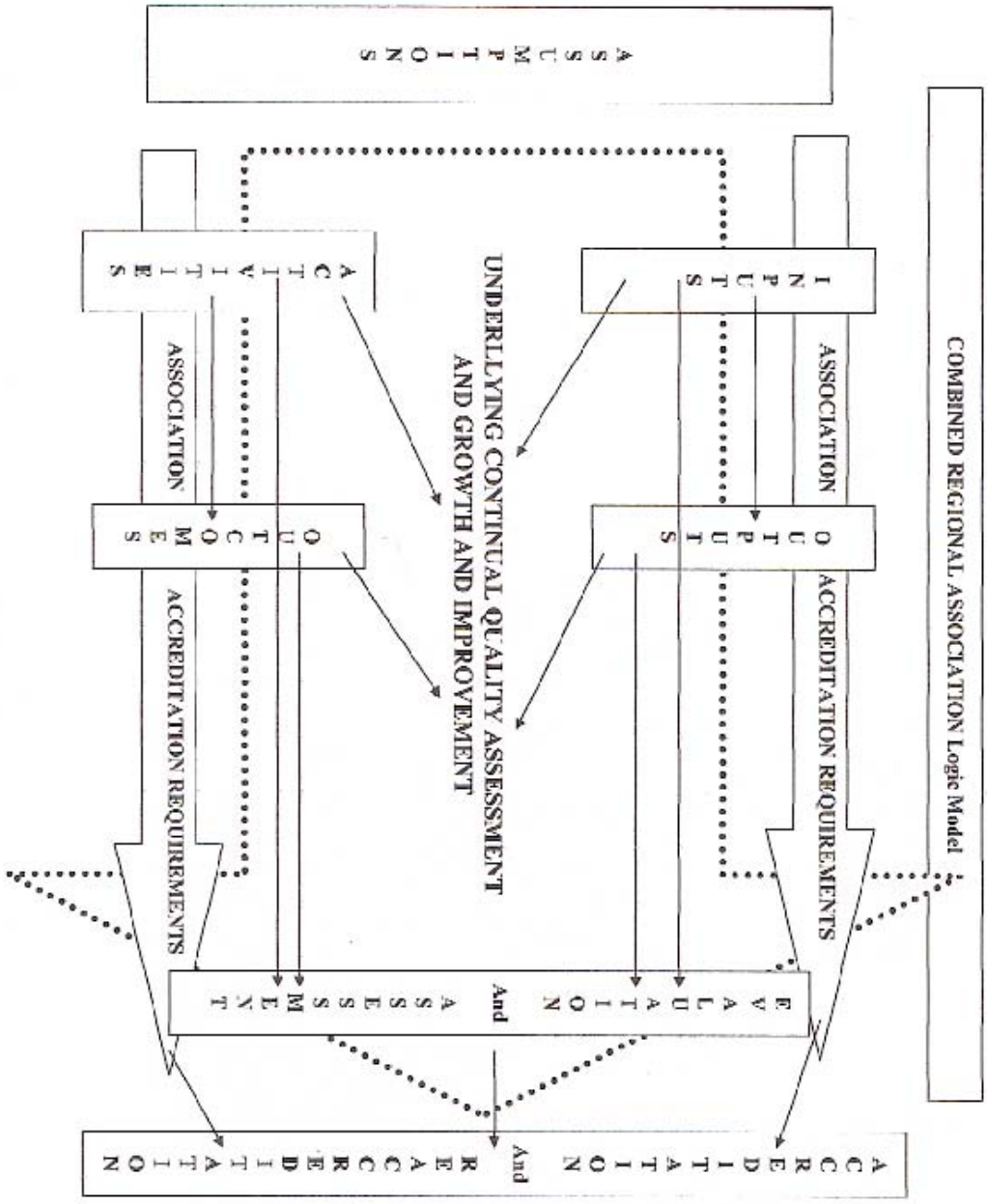
Figure 28: Combined / Unified Logic Model



Conclusions

With respect to the two regions investigated in this study, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the results are indeed encouraging. It is possible to construct a logic model of each regional association's accreditation procedures and processes. These two models, while not identical, are similar enough that a combined logic model for the two associations has been constructed and is proposed as a basis for continuing the study to include other regional associations. Therefore, one conclusion is that it is possible to construct a logic model of the regional accreditation process on an "after the fact" basis.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the successful construction of the logic models is that the methodology applied in this study is, in fact, valid and reliable. This methodology, having been applied to two regions, appears to have applications in additional regions. It may indeed prove that, after the completion of additional studies, the methodology might be modified or expanded, but the basic investigation framework has been tested.

Implications

Perhaps the biggest implication that comes to mind as a result of this study is that, regardless of whether or not it is possible to construct a unified/combined logic model for all six of the regional associations, the logic modeling process itself should have an immediate, noticeable, and profound effect on the accreditation process that is applied individually on each of the thousands of campuses of institutions of higher learning in this country.

The accreditation logic model can serve many functions. Thus far this study has resulted in three logic models, the two specific models shown for each region and the unified/combined model that has been proposed. Regardless of the final outcome with regard to the construction of

a national logic model for accreditation, the regional models, as they stand at this time, can serve a variety of functions in the overall regional accreditation process. Initially, they can serve as the main handout at meetings designed to introduce the accreditation process to a campus. They can also be used at subsequent team and planning meetings. Where more information is required, or in situations requiring a level of component or procedural detail that cannot be accommodated by the logic model approach, additional printed materials can be produced as handouts or attachments. For example, this additional material could be attached to the logic model for further, more detailed discussion about specific assumptions, activities, or accreditation requirements. The logic model diagram could thereby function as the central feature of initial accreditation planning meetings, committee meetings, data gathering activities, or report preparation sessions. Used in this manner, the logic model diagram could serve as central focus and a reminder of the total scope of the accreditation process for those who are about to participate in the some portion of the accreditation activities taking place at their institution of higher education. Having this focus in mind, and with a full understanding and comprehension of the elements and activities involved across the entire campus, those persons participating in the process should approach their individual activities with an awareness of and a respect for the impact that each of them will have on other aspects of the accreditation process. Everyone involved would be aware of the interaction of each of the component parts in the process and its relationship to the desired end results—not just the achievement of institutional accreditation, but the attainment of genuine institutional growth and development regarding the educational results their institution could achieve.

While this study in and of itself does not offer any grounds to imply that logic modeling can assist in making accreditation more effective, that possibility does exist. The desire to

promote more effective accreditation practices has been stated in the philosophies of the two regional associations utilized in this study. For this researcher, the process of studying the associations printed accreditation materials, extracting from them the essential and key components of each process, and subsequently constructing a corresponding logic model, has proved to be immensely helpful in understanding the overall process promoted in each region, along with understanding how they intend for their processes to encourage an increase in the quality of the end results. This understanding, if it were similarly presented and made accessible, through the effective use of proposed logic models, to all persons involved in any of the regional accreditation processes, should encourage and foster more accurate and meaningful accreditation outcomes. These successes could lead to broader and more extensive institutional awareness on each accredited campus, which should result in more successful and more effective educational growth and development.

If this study should be extended to the other regions, there are a limited number of possible outcomes. One of the outcomes would be that all of the six constructed logic models would be similar enough in their scope and application that the construction of a national accreditation logic model would be a foregone conclusion. Another outcome would be that the remaining four accreditation models, once constructed, would be so dissimilar in their scope and function that the construction of a national logic model prove to be impossible.

There are some remaining "combination" possibilities. Of the four remaining association models yet to be constructed, some could relate to each other, some could relate to the first two constructed, and some could relate to each other or to the first two models. In other words, if there is no possibility of constructing a national accreditation logic model, there could be two, three, or four "combined regional accreditation logic models". These are not necessarily the

most advantageous results, especially since it is hoped, based upon the results achieved thus far, that it will be possible to construct a national accreditation logic model. This has all been pure speculation, but it accurately covers the implication possibilities regarding a national accreditation logic model as a result of this work.

Many persons today are beginning to adopt the position that accreditation is a journey and not, as some have felt, and may still feel, a destination. Achieving or maintaining accreditation is the goal of perhaps most institutions of higher learning in this country. It appears, based upon this study, that some of the accreditation organizations are beginning to incorporate, or at least structure their processes around, some type of "enhancement" scenario—whether that is an enhancement of quality, an enhancement of results, or an enhancement of institutional and educational practices. Perhaps it is the journey toward accreditation that is now more important—or at least one of the items that really matters most. Accreditation can still be, and perhaps is still being wielded as a big stick over higher education institutions, but this study indicates that there is at least evidence of change in the wind. The evidence seems to indicate that the regional associations, while still requiring that their basic standards and requirements be met in order to achieve accreditation or reaccreditation, are moving toward the presentation of evidence that indicates institutional growth and development on the part of their member institutions/organizations.

The results demonstrated and presented by this study are themselves an implication for future application. There is no evidence suggesting that there has ever been an examination of the regional accreditation processes based upon the logic model concept. This study, then, is perhaps the first of its kind. While this study was never intended to be only a comparison of the two regions, the logic model concept has shown itself to be useful for determining similarities

and differences between the processes utilized in the two regions already studied. There are four regional accreditation associations remaining to be studied and examined. The implications of this study are that they should be studied in a fashion similar to that utilized in this study. This study has demonstrated that it is possible to construct valid logic models for two of the individual regional processes. This study itself, then, stands as evidence that its methodology could and should utilized for the examination of and the possible construction of the remaining four accreditation models. The original list of 164 words could be expanded upon, if that is deemed necessary, or shown to be required based upon the experience and input of additional researchers. The original list of 164 words was never presented as or intended to be definitive. The original study of two regions has shown that the key words found for these two regions exhibited minor differences—however the similarities in the key words and in the underlying philosophies and processes outweighed any of these differences. The main point is that the methodology detailed and outlined in this study has been shown to be a reasonable procedure to follow and could be applied in any related studies.

Based upon the fact that each of the regional associations represents institutions and organizations from select and limited geographic areas, one would not expect even the two regions included in this study to mirror, copy, or even partially duplicate each other's accreditation processes, especially in these days of rapid change and perhaps subsequent confusion regarding the accreditation process. However, since both regions included in the study have essentially the same reasons for their existence, and ostensibly echo the same goals and objectives, it would be safe to assume that there would at least be some major similarities along the way.

One of the limitations recognized in this study was the fact that there was such a limited amount of research literature available in the area of accreditation. This study may be a step in the right direction. Any additional research generated would not necessarily have to involve logic modeling per se. The logic model approach is only one facet in the entire realm of study that could be carried out with regard to regional and national accreditation. The point here is not to name specific subjects or areas of accreditation that ought to be the focus of formal study, whether qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method. If this study generates additional interest on the part of other researchers with any interest in accreditation and related education matters, then the net result will be a benefit to all. The more research that is conducted, the more accreditation related literature will be generated. This additional literature that would be available for search could generate additional interest in more and more areas—until finally the situation of not being able to find enough accreditation related literature would no longer exist.

The original pilot study initially was designed to focus on regional accreditation and the systematic program review or quality assurance measures of one state. Most institutions of higher education are required to undergo not only regional accreditation, but also some form of regular review by the board or organization in their state that is responsible for that state's higher education policy. With regard to the state utilized in the pilot study, the procedures were so dissimilar that the logic model approach proved to be a futile attempt. There are 49 additional states, each one having authority over program approval or continued quality assurance. It is highly possible that the logic model approach will be applicable in some of the remaining states. In those states where the program approval/quality assurance procedures show more similarity to the regional accreditation process, the logic model approach promises real benefit and value. The logic model approach, if applicable to both regional and state accreditation/approval

processes, could serve as a basis for reducing duplicate efforts on the part of institutions of higher education in that state. The logic model approach could serve as a basis for standardizing the efforts required by an institution relative to time commitments, faculty participation, financial requirements of the accreditation/approval process, data collection and presentation, report preparation and presentation, and communication to all stakeholders/constituencies involved with and concerned with the continued growth and improvement of the higher education institution.

In addition to the six regional accreditation associations, there are also forty-eight professional and specialized accrediting organizations. Each of these groups conducts periodic accreditation or evaluation processes in order to evaluate and grant accreditation to their specific professional training program or specialized field of study at institutions of higher education. In essence, this implies that there are institutions which have to undergo periodic regional accreditation, periodic state program approval, and periodic department/school/program approval. If there were some standardization of the required approval processes based upon an underlying logic model approach, there could then also be a corresponding reduction in the previously mentioned time commitments, faculty participation requirements, financial requirements of the accreditation/approval process, data collection and presentation, report preparation and presentation, and communication of the necessary information to all stakeholders/constituencies involved with an institution that finds itself in this position of satisfying multiple organizations in their quest for accreditation/approval.

From a philosophical perspective, this study could be one approach toward bringing some amount of cohesiveness and consistency to the process of accreditation. Based upon the similarities found thus far in the study of two of the regional associations, the implication is that

this will likely become possible. The creation of a logic model that is based upon all of the found similarities in the key wording, the procedures and processes, and the underlying philosophies of the regional accreditation models would go a long way toward producing a clear, concise, and reasoned representation of the component activities and procedures involved in the accreditation process. If the process is more precisely understood, both philosophically and conceptually, by those who are participants at the various levels, the chances are that the end results of the accreditation process will stand up under greater scrutiny and inspection. The reported results will carry more meaning, and they will be a more accurate reflection of what is actually occurring. These end results, then, should lead to more institutional awareness and educational growth and development—which is, in the final analysis, what the regional accrediting organizations are attempting to achieve with accreditation. This would be an especially appropriate implication in the light of the fact that the two regional associations studied thus far are changing and amending their processes and procedures in an attempt to promote more institutional awareness, growth, effectiveness, and improvement in educational results achieved.

An additional implication would apply as a result of this study, especially if this logic model approach is widely judged to be an appropriate and effective framework for the study of existing accreditation and program approval processes. Should this be the case, and logic modeling as an activity gains more and more acceptance in evaluation and assessment of educational programs, then it should also be given serious consideration in other higher education fields, such as Higher Education Administration, Higher Education Student Services, and in the field of Higher Education Curricular Studies. All of these fields of higher education are decision, product, and process oriented. If programs are evaluated and assessed based upon

an underlying logic model, then these administrative, content, and student services areas of higher education could also benefit from being designed and implemented through an appropriate logic model lens.

There is also, as the research utilized in the development of this study indicated, a very obvious area, where as yet logic modeling is still somewhat underutilized. The bulk of the literature research that was incorporated in this study was found in the Grant and Charitable Foundations arena. Foundations and Funds operating in these areas are promoting the use of logic modeling to those who are applying for funding from these sources. As was noted in some of the foundation literature quoted here, even though logic modeling has been shown to be effective when used as the basis for designing and describing the program seeking the funding, it is still not utilized in all cases. Perhaps the organizations, foundations, and charitable trusts that are providing funding could incorporate into their funding application process a basic logic model for the conceptual use of the person(s) preparing the grant request. If this were done, the overall quality of grant projects seeking funding and thereby the overall quality of grants awarded might be enhanced.

Since this approach is thought to be unique in applying it to the study of accreditation procedures, it is most likely just as unique when applied to other processes and procedures. It has already been stated that it could apply to other higher education areas, and to the grant application and funding process. As more study of the logic modeling method is completed, the possibility exists that the logic modeling approach could be applicable in areas, subjects, and studies as yet untried or not thought of in connection with logic modeling. Perhaps a future study of logic modeling itself, with an emphasis on attempting to apply it to as many areas or

subjects as possible, would reveal valid applications that at this point have simply not been thought of or considered.

To summarize, the following implications of this study have been noted:

- The incorporation of a logic model to function as the central feature of all introductory, planning, data collection, team, and report preparation meetings relative to an impending regional accreditation review
- The construction of four additional Regional Association Logic Models
- The possible construction of a national Accreditation Logic Model
- The incorporation of an "Enhancement" feature into all accreditation models
- The development of a recognized methodology for the construction of a logic model "after the fact"
- The stimulation of additional accreditation-oriented research studies
- The development, where possible, of a state model for program approval and review that complements that state's regional accreditation model
- The incorporation of the logic model approach by the 48 professional and specialized accrediting organizations
- Stimulation of the development of cohesiveness and consistency across all accreditation models
- Application of Logic Modeling to the fields of Higher Education Administration, Student Services, and Curricular studies
- The incorporation of a logic model approach to all grant and charitable trust funding packages

- The application of the logic model approach to areas and subjects as yet not considered

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to extend the study to the remaining regions. Having successfully completed the construction of two regional accreditation logic models and one unified logic model based upon the similarities in the two regions, in theory it should be possible to construct a combined or unified logic model based upon the remaining four regional associations. This study should be extended to each of the remaining four regional associations. The results, after constructing four additional regional accreditation models, would be analyzed and compared. If the resulting models were sufficiently similar, these results could possibly lead to the construction of a national accreditation logic model based upon the similarities found in each regional accreditation model. If the remaining four associations are found to be dissimilar, such that a combined model would not be possible, then this extended study would show that there is no possibility existing for the creation of a national accreditation model.

The phenomenology of evaluation and even the phenomenology of teaching itself, have implications that have yet to be studied in great detail, especially with regard to how these actions and activities themselves impact the learning and accreditation processes. Each of these areas is highly unique, and is affected by situation, timing, sociological and societal backgrounds, and innumerable other factors. It would be nice to be able to investigate these areas as sources of additional information that impacts all areas of education—not just institutional accreditation and student learning.

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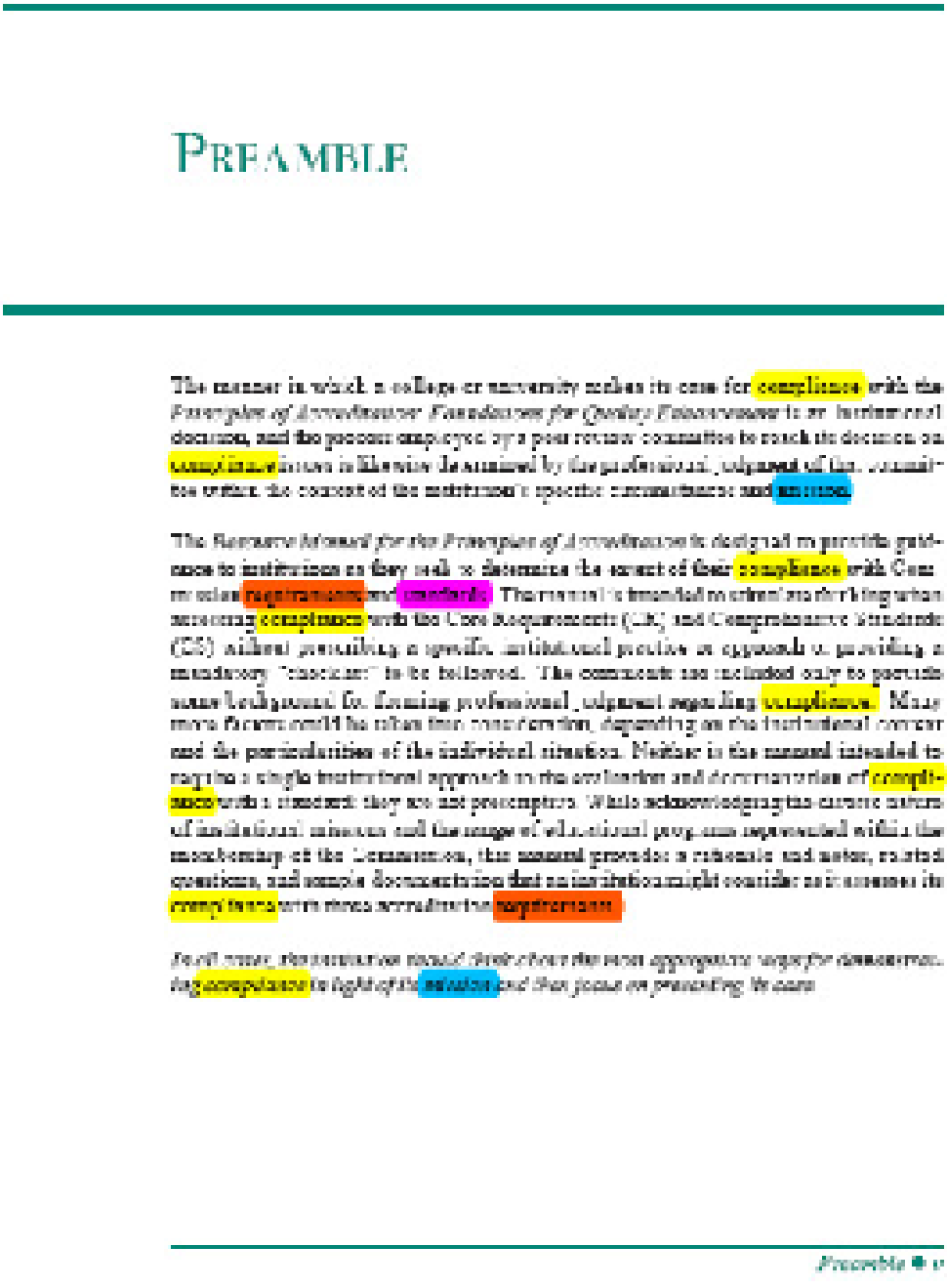
Appendices

Appendix A

Sample SACS Highlighted Key Words Page



PREAMBLE

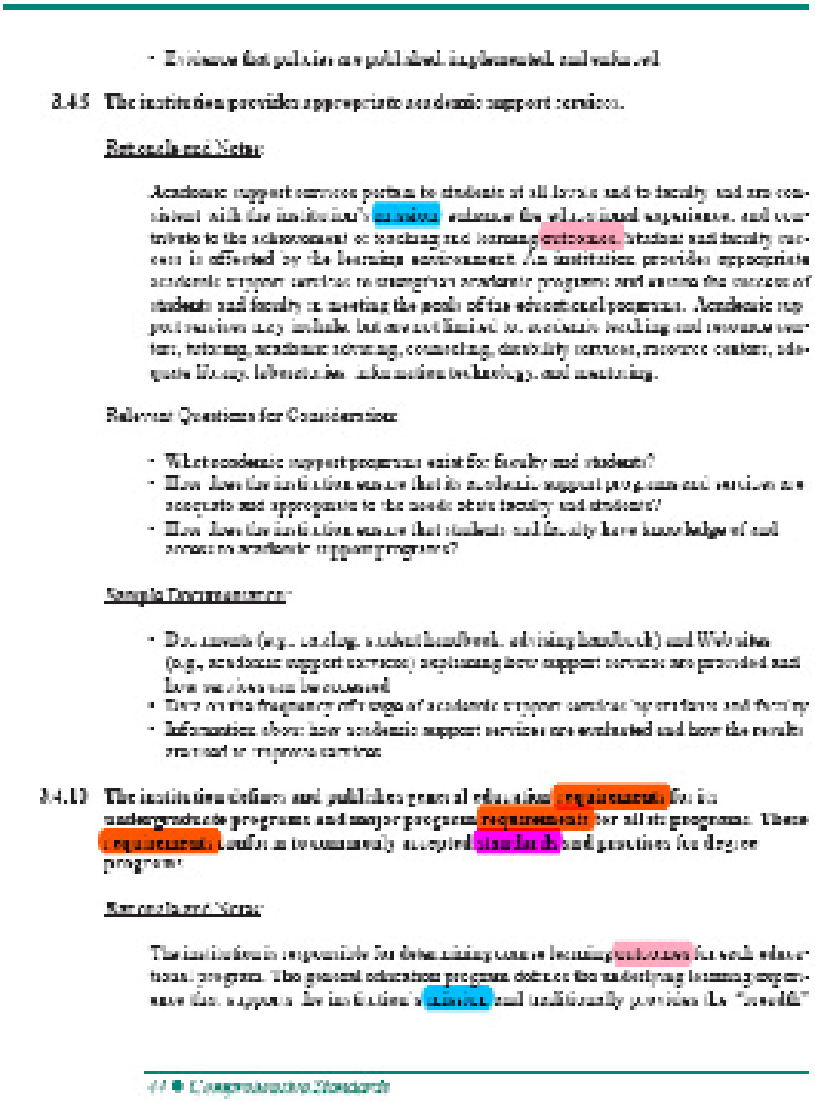
The manner in which a college or university makes its case for compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* is an institutional decision, and the persons employed by a peer review committee to reach its decision on compliance issues is likewise determined by the professional judgment of the committee within the context of the institution's specific circumstances and mission.

The *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation* is designed to provide guidance to institutions as they seek to determine the extent of their compliance with Core requirements and standards. The manual is intended to orient readers working toward assessing compliance with the Core Requirements (CR) and Comprehensive Standards (CS) without prescribing a specific institutional practice or approach or providing a mandatory "checklist" to be followed. The comments are included only to provide some background for forming professional judgment regarding compliance. Many more factors could be taken into consideration, depending on the institutional context and the particularities of the individual situation. Neither is the manual intended to require a single institutional approach to the application and demonstration of compliance with a standard; they are not prescriptive. While acknowledging the current nature of institutional mission and the range of educational programs represented within the membership of the Commission, the manual provides a rationale and notes, related questions, and sample documentation that an institution might consider as it assesses its compliance with these accreditation requirements.

In all cases, the institution should determine the most appropriate ways to demonstrate its compliance in light of the mission and the issues it is addressing. In cases

Appendix B

Sample SACS Highlighted Key Words Page



- Evidence that policies are published, implemented, and reviewed

3.4.5 The institution provides appropriate academic support services.

Rationale and Notes:

Academic support services pertain to students at all levels and to faculty and are consistent with the institution's mission, enhance the educational experience, and contribute to the achievement of teaching and learning outcomes. Student and faculty success is affected by the learning environment. An institution provides appropriate academic support services to strengthen academic programs and assess the success of students and faculty in meeting the goals of the educational programs. Academic support services may include, but are not limited to, academic tracking and resource centers, tutoring, academic advising, counseling, disability services, resource centers, adequate library, laboratories, educational technology, and mentoring.

Reviewer Questions for Consideration:

- What academic support programs exist for faculty and students?
- How does the institution ensure that its academic support programs and services are accessible and appropriate to the needs of its faculty and students?
- How does the institution ensure that students and faculty have knowledge of and access to academic support programs?

Sample Documentation:

- Documents (e.g., catalog, student handbook, advising handbook) and Websites (e.g., academic support services) explaining how support services are provided and how services can be accessed
- Data on the frequency of usage of academic support services by students and faculty
- Information about how academic support services are evaluated and how the results are used to improve services

3.4.10 The institution defines and publishes general education requirements for its undergraduate programs and major program requirements for all its programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.

Rationale and Notes:

The institution is responsible for determining course learning outcomes for each educational program. The general education program defines the underlying learning experiences that support the institution's mission and traditionally provides the "breadth"

Vita

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