



**A & QI  
COMMONS  
ACCREDITATION &  
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT  
COMMONS WORKSHOP**

# 12<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION CONFERENCE

November 25 & 26, 2019 – New Delhi

*"Millennial Job Challenge: How B-schools respond with Accreditation"*



*Featuring...*



**Standards for Educational Advancement & Accreditation (SEAA) Trust, New Delhi**

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# Bridging the Gap Between Perceived and Actual Quality through Voluntary Accreditation

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*What is the experience that you want to deliver to your customers?*

Before I answer this question, I think it is important to understand the key elements of the question.

First, *who are your customers?* While it is easy to suggest that our customers in higher education are the students, and indeed they should be, I submit that your students are only part of the customer equation. If employers do not hire your graduates, your business school will fail. The ultimate customers, or end-users, are the employers of your graduates. Therefore, I believe it is critical in higher education to consider the employers as customers. In that context, it is essential that you are delivering the right knowledge and skills that your employers require.

Second, *what constitutes the customer experience that you seek to deliver?* For the students as the customers, it would be an experience that best promotes learning new knowledge and practical skill development, and how to apply both in today's workplace. For the employers as the customers, it would be an experience that provides trained and ready employees that have both the technical and soft skills necessary to add value to the organization. An outcome of business is to generate net revenue. The actions of the employees must result in creation of value and to create value, employees must have both knowledge (technical) and soft skills (non-technical) abilities.

Third, *what is the educational delivery that you believe you are giving?* If your educational experience is based on the traditional construct of lecture, homework, and testing, I submit that this ancient approach will fail you in today's world. The sad truth is that a professor pulled from the 19th Century could, with very little effort, teach very successfully in today's classrooms while at the same time a businessman from the 19th Century would fail quickly in today's workplace. ***Why is our educational delivery the same today as it was 200 years ago even though our workplaces are largely unrecognizable compared to that period?*** I believe it is time to consider our delivery of higher education and

transform it into one that is truly aligned with the needs of the workplace, now and into the future.

With a deeper understanding of the words, we can return to the original question: *what is the experience that you want to deliver to your customers?* To answer this question, consider an analogy based on the restaurant industry.

*What do restaurants do?* They satisfy hunger by providing food (meals) for the body (relatedly, higher education provides knowledge and skills with food for the mind). There are many different levels of meal delivery, but for the sake of argument, I will use three levels.

The first level is the *street vendor*. The street vendor provides meals that are quick, easy, and low-cost. The food quality may be fine, and it can certainly satisfy a hunger. *What is the experience that the street vendor wishes to provide?* It is simply to satisfy an immediate need (hunger) and move onto the next person. Not a lot of choice, obviously, but still the need is addressed with a simple delivery-based experience. In terms of atmosphere, it just depends on the street corner the vendor selected.

The second level is the *typical restaurant*. The typical restaurant has a menu of choices and it is up to the customer to select which items on that menu they want to help satisfy their hunger. Perhaps the restaurant has a daily special to promote, but otherwise it is just about reading a menu organized by categories of entrees, making dish selections, and then having the meal promptly delivered. In terms of an experience, it is about affordability, consistency, and production at a level to satisfy many people's appetites at the same time. There are variations on atmospheres, but in general they are all about the same with several tables organized within a larger room and some nice decorations on the walls.

The third level is *fine dining*. All of us have had this type of experience. From time to time, we treat ourselves to an elegant meal at an upscale establishment. The experience begins with how we are welcomed to the place, how we are seated, and the relationship we build with the waitstaff. There may or may not be a menu. There are probably few, if any, specials because everything is special (you would not go there if they were not special!). If there is a menu, most likely it is organized by cuisines rather than by food groups. We usually spend several hours at such an establishment because it is a complete dining and social experience. In terms of atmosphere, each one is unique and carefully considered relative to the experience that is desired for the customers.

*In terms of your higher education experience based on the analogy of the restaurant levels, which one are you?*

In my involvement with higher education throughout the world, many business schools have a perception of themselves that is higher than the actual experiences

they deliver. Perhaps it is only human nature to consider ourselves at higher levels than reality, no doubt true for how organizations frequently see themselves. This is often the case before the academic institution undertakes voluntary accreditation with an internationally recognized business school accreditor.

Accreditation essentially comes in two forms: *compliance-based accreditation* and *voluntary accreditation*.

Compliance-based accreditation is what we must do to obtain and maintain a license to provide higher education degrees. Compliance-based accreditation is usually synonymous with regulation. This is what state and national governmental accreditation agencies do. If you want to be in the education business and deliver degrees, you must comply with specific rules and regulations. It is really no different than any other business that requires a permit or license to provide its products and services. In the world of higher education, we just have a grander word for this: *accreditation*.

Voluntary accreditation, however, is very different. You choose to seek the accreditation, hence the word “voluntary”.

For business schools, voluntary accreditation includes Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Association of MBA's (AMBA), and European Foundation for Quality Management (EFMD).

Each of these agencies provides globally recognized accreditation services that create quality and value for the higher education institution. Voluntary accreditation has little to do with compliance. Instead, voluntary accreditation is focused on quality and excellence for the educational experience you want to deliver. Voluntary accreditation helps ensure that you are truly delivering on your promise.

At its core, voluntary accreditation provides you with well-defined processes that you use to close the gap between aspiration and reality relative to your educational experience. Voluntary education is a way to elevate your quality, align goals with results, and ensure that you are meeting your delivery expectations.

The street vendor, typical restaurant, and the fine dining establishment all have compliance-based permits to operate. That is about all the street vendor needs. The typical restaurant may seek out some external assistance; however, it probably does not have a unique quality seal of recognition. What distinguishes the fine dining establishment is that the owners also sought recognized quality assurance standards to ensure that the superiority of the experience is at the level the establishment desires, that the workforce has a quality focus, and everyone works tirelessly to maintain the brand.



Voluntary accreditation will help transition your institution into the fine dining experience you desire. Not just for your students, but most importantly for the employers of your graduates. Voluntary accreditation helps you fulfill customer expectations of your graduates and will keep them coming back to you year-after-year.

Your employers do not want just any graduates to fill those job vacancies. They want, and expect you to deliver, graduates who have both the knowledge and soft skills they need to be successful in today's 21st Century workplace. Internationally recognized accreditation for your business school will help you ensure that your educational experience is where it needs to be.

Your students expect it and the employers of your graduate demand it – time for you to chose quality and deliver on that promise.

