Regional Accreditation in the 21ˢᵗ Century:

Changes and Challenges

Setting the stage: Major trends and challenges in higher education
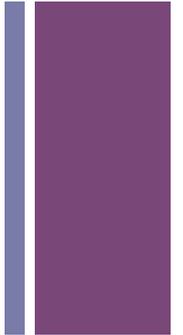
- Unmet demand for college/college as the path to jobs

- Economic need for more college graduates/increased "productivity"

- Changing demographics/declining college readiness

- Diminishing state support for higher education

- Rising tuition, increasing debt burden, high default rates

- Changing enrollment patterns; swirl

- Dissatisfaction with learning outcomes

- Low graduation rates

Disruptions in higher education
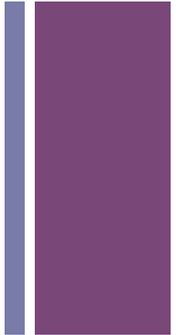
- Growth of the for-profit sector and other new providers
  - National footprint entities

- Emergence of global education enterprises

- The impact of Bologna on thinking about college outcomes/accreditation

- Increasingly complex governance structures/arrangements

- Rapid expansion of new delivery methods, e.g. online, flipped classrooms, MOOCs, badges

- Development of new, less expensive faculty models

- Resurgence/growth of competency-based models

+ The role of accreditation in higher education
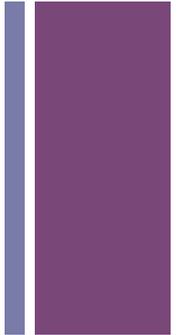
- The traditional triad: accreditors, states, and federal government
  - Criticality of accreditor gatekeeping function
    - Accreditors subject to Department of Education regulations, which are increasingly prescriptive

- Shifting role over time
  - Compliance with minimum "input" standards/regulatory
  - Quality improvement with growing emphasis on outcomes/ qualitative, formative, collegial
  - Quality assurance, public accountability, transparency/regulatory, quantitative, summative

  - QUERY: Can accreditors simultaneously fulfill all these functions?

+ Challenges to accreditation
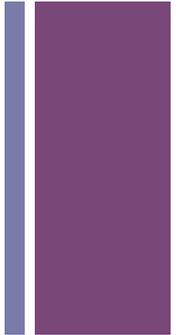
- Reports you should read
  - Gillen, Bennett, Vedder, *The Inmates Running the Asylum? An Analysis of Higher Education Accreditation,* Center for College Affordability and Productivity, October 2010
  - National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, *Higher Education Accreditation Reauthorization Policy Recommendations,* February 8, 2012
  - American Council on Education Task Force on Institutional Accreditation, *Assuring Academic Quality in the 21st Century: Self-Regulation in a New Era,* July 5, 2012
  - Eaton, *The Future of Accreditation,* Society for College and University Planning, Planning for Higher Education, Volume 40, Number 3, April-June 2012

Challenge 1: Accreditation costs too much and adds little/no value
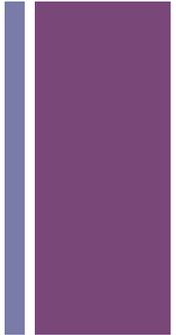
- Calls to cut direct costs, including self-studies, long visits, and frequency of reviews

- Calls for more data-based reviews using existing data sets

- Calls for "less intrusive, prescriptive, costly and granular" processes/requirements by accreditors (and feds)

- Calls to cut indirect costs associated with team/commission recommendations

- Calls to create risk-based processes/no one-size-fits-all approach

Challenge 2: Accreditation does not assure quality
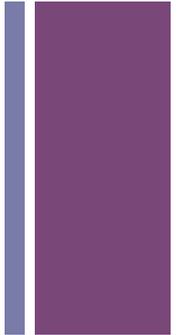
- Note the inherent tension among the three roles of compliance, quality improvement, and quality assurance

- Calls for greater focus on results and outcomes

- Calls for accreditors to set standards of performance, which compete with equally strong calls to protect institutional autonomy, academic freedom and diversity

Challenge 3: Accreditation is ineffective at evaluating the wide range of existing institutions
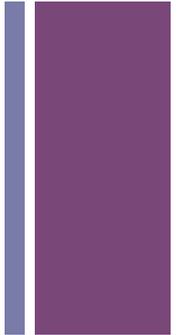
- Calls to reform or eliminate regions/regional accreditation

- Calls for segmental accreditation

- Calls for risk-based processes that defer to strong and effective institutions

Challenge 4: Accreditation does not distinguish levels of quality
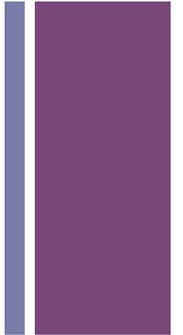
- Calls for differential levels of accreditation

- Calls for less frequent reviews for strong institutions

- Calls for a scale, rating, or ranking of institutions

Challenge 5: Accreditation is secretive/not useful the public
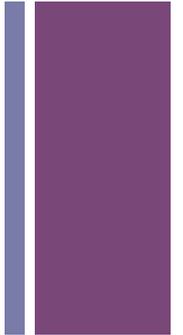
- Calls for accreditation reports, commission action letters and more to be made public

- Calls for all accreditation information to be made available to the public including data on completion, student debt, employment, further study, student learning, and more

- Calls for accreditation to have a scale, rating or ranking

- Calls for more public members on commissions and teams

Challenge 6: Accreditation is incestuous and self-referential
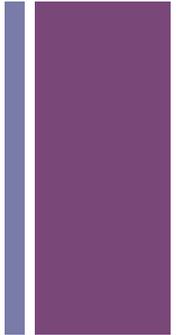
- Calls for replacing peer review with a professional cadre of evaluators

- Calls for more public members on commissions and teams

Challenge 7: Accreditation does not get rid of bad actors
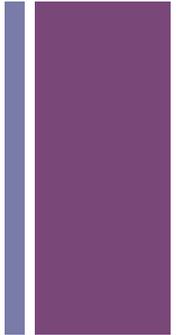
- Calls for quick and decisive action on substandard institutions

- Calls for regionals not to accredit for-profits and others

# + Challenge 8: Accreditation stifles innovation
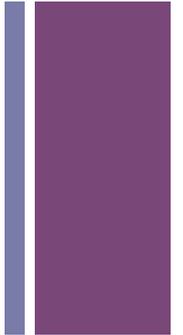
- Calls for quicker path to accreditation for new, innovative institutions

- Calls for lessening of federal control so that accreditors can:
  - Be more open to innovation
  - Devote less time to granular issues like credit hour, student ID in online courses

- Calls for recognition of new delivery models, like MOOCs

Challenge 9: Accreditation cannot keep pace with changing delivery methods and models
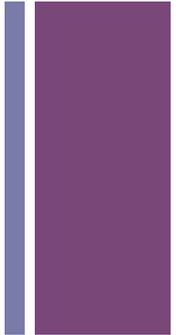
- Calls for someone to certify student learning

- Calls for highly trained staff and peer reviewers

- Calls for support of innovation and willingness to experiment and incubate new ideas

How accreditation deals with disruption: three examples
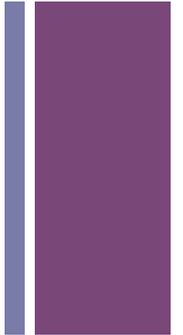
- Competency-based education

- For-profits

- New faculty models

How accreditors are dealing with competency-based education
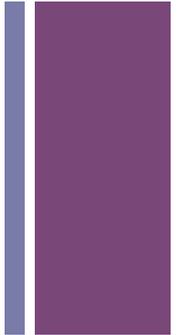
- Challenges
  - Credit hour requirements imposed by the feds
  - Lack of confidence in measures of student learning
  - No applicable substantive change policy/process
  - Few reviewers with expertise

- Approaches
  - Creating a policy and requirements for approval
  - Devising a template for proposals
  - Training staff and evaluators

How accreditors are dealing with for-profit institutions
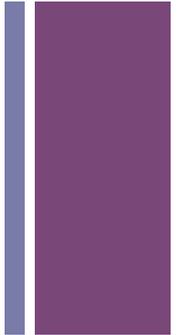
- Challenges
  - Understanding of the business model
  - Range and complexity of for-profit institutions
  - Great variability in governance structures
  - Special issues with publicly traded companies

- Approaches
  - New policy on independent governing boards
  - New policy on proprietary information
  - Drawing in and training more evaluators
  - Utilizing outside auditors to review finances
  - Examining alignment of resources with mission/serving students
  - New emphasis on "the public good"

How accreditors are dealing with new unbundled faculty models
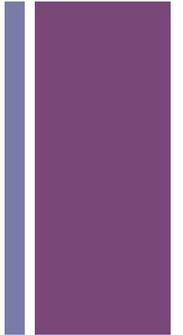
- Challenges
  - Very different from the traditional full-time faculty model
  - Unclear how faculty functions are fulfilled
  - Ensuring the faculty's traditional oversight role of academics
  - Different qualifications for each faculty role

- Approaches
  - Flexible requirements about having full-time faculty members
  - No rigid standards on the level of degree needed to teach
  - Holistic approach to review
  - No requirements for the <u>way</u> that faculty participate in governance

+ Ongoing challenges of peer-based, mission-driven accreditation
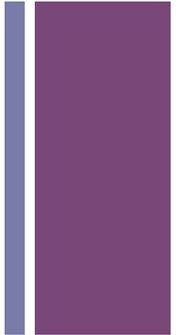
- Well-qualified and trained teams with relevant experience

- Quality control over the process and teams

- Lack of standardized measures of learning and success: every review is different and customized

+ What can you do?

- Stay involved on your campus

- Volunteer for WASC committees and teams

- Ask your ALO to send you everything that WASC sends you

- Encourage your ALO and other to comment on proposed policies, changes in the Standards, and new processes