

# THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF ACCREDITATION

Discover the future of  
business education



ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR  
BUSINESS SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS





# ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

**Bringing Together Those Dedicated to Teaching Excellence**

Dear Colleagues:

Last year, as part of our Going Beyond Accreditation initiative, we announced an exciting new collaboration with the global higher education consulting firm, CarringtonCrisp, to commence work on a new online research library and knowledge portal that would provide statistical data and analysis on a wide array of topics and issues facing our members.

Our first survey findings were released last June at ACBSP Conference 2016 in Atlanta and they were quite illuminating including the fact that 90% of respondents agreed students will need a greater variety of business education to meet their career needs throughout their lives. In addition, many of the respondents indicated that business schools and colleges will be developing more joint degrees with employers. This was just the tip of the iceberg.

Clearly, we are in the midst of changing and challenging times and business education will have to transform its approach or risk extinction. That's a powerful statement.

**These initial discoveries served as a template for our next study to examine the true value of accreditation.** We are often asked, "what is the purpose of accreditation?" Frequently followed by "what will it do for our college/university once we are accredited?"

We are very grateful to the many members who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the study as your input and responsiveness remains critical to this endeavor. We trust these new findings will be as enlightening as the first survey results and hope you will share this with your faculty and your school's administration.

With over 1,200 member campuses in more than 60 countries throughout the world, ACBSP stands beside you as we continue to foster new learning techniques and practices that will help prepare the next generation of leadership.

It is our honor to be of service.

Best always,

**ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS**

Jeffrey Alderman  
President and CEO

What is the purpose of accreditation? It's a question often asked. And often followed with: And what will it do for our business programs once they are accredited? To that end, ACBSP commissioned independent higher education consulting firm, CarringtonCrisp, to undertake research among the ACBSP member colleges/universities focused on their experience of accreditation.

Data was collected in early 2017 with 440 responses to an online survey of which 327 completed the survey. Among those completing the survey were 50 colleges/universities who are in the accreditation process, but not yet accredited. Among the accredited business programs, there was at least one business program which gained accreditation during each year since 1988. Just over a third of the responding colleges/universities had been accredited during the last five years.

Overwhelmingly, accreditation is seen as a positive experience. Among the accredited business programs, 85% definitely or mostly agree that "I would recommend ACBSP accreditation to a non-accredited college/university." A further 87% also definitely or mostly agree that "Our business programs are better having been through the accreditation process." It is also clear that accreditation is a stretching and valuable process with 72% mostly or definitely disagreeing that "The accreditation process is not sufficiently rigorous."

Despite the clear endorsement of ACBSP accreditation from those who have gone through the process, there is always room for improvement. Many accredited business programs (85%) definitely or mostly agree that "A better understanding of the accreditation process before starting the journey to be accredited would be valuable." A smaller, but still significant percentage, (24%) definitely agree that "The cost of supporting the accreditation process is outweighed by the benefits of being accredited."

Ensuring colleges/universities make the most of the accreditation process and gain ongoing benefits from their business programs being accredited must be a priority, demonstrating the value of having ACBSP accreditation. Indeed, 81% of accredited business programs definitely or mostly agree that "Further support to maximize the benefits of accreditation for our business programs would be valuable." Peer learning to help accredited business programs maximize the benefits of accreditation would be a valuable addition to the process, perhaps with newly accredited business programs having an ongoing mentor relationship for the six months immediately after becoming accredited.

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**87%** also definitely or mostly agree that "Our business programs are better having been through the accreditation process"



## The purpose of accreditation

More than anything else, business programs enter the accreditation process “To provide external validation of our college/university and its programs,” chosen by 75% of respondents as their main motivation. Benchmarking against a set of external quality standards provides reassurance both that the service meets the needs of customers, but also that it matches the quality that the market expects.

External drivers for accreditation were also reflected in the 55% of responding business programs who said they were motivated to be accredited “To support the desired positioning of our college/university with external audiences.” External support was also recognized in another way with 56% of colleges/universities seeking ACBSP accreditation “To join a network of colleges/universities with similarly accredited business programs.”

However, the motivation to be accredited also has strong internal drivers. More than 6 out of 10 (61%) respondents indicated that they were seeking “To gain support for improving the quality of our business programs.”

The changing needs of both students and employers means it is important to ensure programs are up to date. Data from the accreditation process can be used to support internal quality improvement, both for content and delivery of programs, but also to gain internal commitment and resources. In a similar vein, just under half (46%) of the responding colleges/universities were motivated to get their business programs accredited, because “It was part of our strategic plan.”



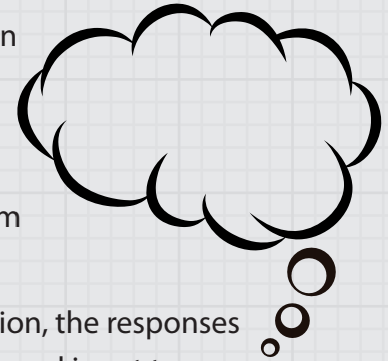
**55%** of responding colleges/universities who said they were motivated to be accredited “To support the desired positioning of our college/university with external audiences”

## Don't wait to be accredited

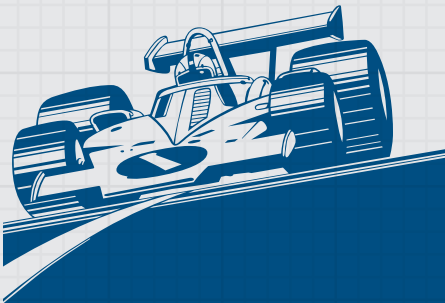
The benefits don't just come once a business program receives its accreditation, but can flow during the accreditation process as well. For accredited business programs, almost three-quarters (72%) found that during the process of gaining accreditation they "Gained external input to improve the quality of our business programs."

The internal benefits are particularly noticeable during the accreditation process. Just under two-thirds (66%) indicate that the process "Helped us to think clearly about our strategy and priorities," 44% said that it "Created a positive atmosphere within our college/university" and a little over a third (35%) that it "Drew out the skills and talent from our faculty and staff."

Among the colleges/universities currently in the process of accreditation, the responses were more positive. Just over three-quarters (77%) are "Receiving external input to improve the quality of our business programs" 75% indicate "It is helping us to think clearly about our strategy and priorities," and 40% mention that it is "Creating a positive atmosphere within our college/university."



## Speeding ahead



While benefits flow during the process, they come quickly once accreditation has been achieved. Just under half (45%) of the responding business programs found benefits from being accredited "As soon as the accreditation process was completed." In the first year following accreditation, 78% of business programs gaining accreditation identified benefits for their business programs as a result of being accredited.

In the first year following accreditation, **78%** of colleges/universities gaining accreditation identified benefits for their college/university as a result of being accredited

**81%** found that "Student learning outcome assessment processes were improved"

# The power of accreditation

The study sought to define benefits in five key areas – Students, Faculty, Resources, Operations and External.

## Students

Among business programs already accredited, the greatest benefit for students was that “Student learning outcome assessment processes were improved,” selected by 81% of respondents. This outcome was also anticipated by many business programs (85%) currently going through the accreditation process.

Just over a quarter of accredited respondents (27%) found that “Students reported higher overall satisfaction from the business programs” and 1 in 5 that “Students became more actively involved in the strategic direction of the business programs.” Building involvement and engagement of students in their programs will produce a virtuous feedback loop, increasing student satisfaction and driving a desire for continued involvement, but it takes more than accreditation to achieve such outcomes. Accreditation can provide a platform for continuous improvement, but it is important to maintain momentum once accreditation has been achieved to ensure ongoing positive change.

Those business programs currently being accredited expect a similar pattern of benefits for students, but if anything, are more positive. Just over half (56%) anticipate “Students reporting higher overall satisfaction from the business programs,” more than a quarter (27%) expect that “Student placement improves” and 23% believe that “Students (will) become more actively involved in the strategic direction of the business programs.”

In other CarringtonCrisp research, the power of accreditation with prospective students is clear. In the most recent Tomorrow’s Masters study of more than 1,000 prospective Masters students, fewer than 10% definitely agree that accreditation played no part in their choice of where to study with an identical response in the Tomorrow’s MBA study of prospective students.



## Faculty

Perhaps the strongest benefits identified from accreditation can be found with faculty. More than half the accredited business programs found that “Faculty became more actively involved in the strategic direction of the business programs” (53%) and gained from “Networking at ACBSP conferences and training sessions” (52%).

Many business programs (39%) also found that “The number of academically qualified faculty members increased,” while 28% identified that “Faculty participation in professional development increased”.

Just under a quarter (24%) also discovered that “Faculty participation in scholarly activities increased.” One in nine benefited from “Faculty workload improving,” perhaps part of the same group that saw increased numbers of qualified faculty.

For business programs currently being accredited, there are similar responses. Among the benefits anticipated, 54% select “Faculty become more actively involved in the strategic direction of the business programs,” 48% highlight “Faculty participation in professional development increases,” 40% choose “Networking at ACBSP conferences and training sessions,” 38% believe that “The number of academically qualified faculty members (will) increase” and 35% that “Faculty participation in scholarly activities (will) increase.”

Just as with students, engagement is key. Involving faculty in the accreditation process, explaining the purpose of accreditation and outlining the benefits for them and for the business programs, will drive greater benefits from the process. Individuals will gain, but the college/ university community will gain more as the focus on continuous improvement is strengthened.

## Services

Whether as a consequence of being accredited or during the process of accreditation, there is a benefit for program resources. Among the accredited business programs, 44% indicated that “New resources in fields relating to business education management were added,” just over a quarter (28%) indicate that “New equipment was acquired” and 1 in 5 find that “Classrooms utilization was improved” while 23% discover that “Library utilization was improved.”

Perhaps most importantly, 24% of accredited business programs found that staff numbers increased. With the performance improvements that accreditation brings, there is a greater demand to be met and, therefore, staff numbers rise. Among business programs going through accreditation the increase in staff numbers is more marked, with 30% indicating employee growth as they go through the process of accreditation.



Almost two-thirds (65%) of those being accredited also report “New resources in fields relating to business education management are added,” 33% are seeing “Classroom utilization improving” and 23% indicate that “Library utilization improves.”

**39%** found that “The number of academically qualified faculty members increased”



# Operations

With accreditation now available as a tool to support marketing activity, many business programs appear to review their engagement with prospective staff, students, employers and other stakeholders. For 40% of accredited business programs, marketing improved, while 39% indicate that “Public relations improved,” undoubtedly part of which is letting local communities know about the accreditation success. However, the public relations need to be sustained. Announcing accreditation is important, but continuing to show its purpose and power through other activities and successes, engaging students and staff to spread the message through social media are just as significant as the initial announcement.

The process of quality improvement that accreditation focuses on has other important benefits in the operation of business programs. “Operational efficiency improved” among 36% of accredited business programs and 40% found that “Operational effectiveness improved.” Improvements in efficiency and effectiveness no doubt release resources for investment in staff and the student experience, again creating a virtuous circle of positive change for a business program.

Among those currently being accredited, the improvements in operations are even more marked, perhaps reflecting the rapidity with which benefits flow from accreditation highlighted earlier in this report.

More than 6 out of 10 business programs (62%) in the accreditation process find that “Operational effectiveness improves,” while 53% indicate that “Operational efficiency improves.” The discipline required for success in the accreditation process clearly drives better organization in many colleges/universities. Almost half (49%) of those in the process of accreditation also indicate that “Marketing improves,” perhaps as they begin to leverage their membership of ACBSP and strategic intent to improve the quality of their offer.



**50%** of the accredited respondents indicate that as a result of being accredited “Our business programs were better perceived in the local community”

## External

While the focus of accreditation is on internal quality improvement, the impact of accreditation has the potential to extend far beyond the college/university. Half of the accredited respondents indicate that as a result of being accredited “Our business programs were better perceived in the local community.” However, there is a community benefit beyond business programs, 39% of the accredited respondents indicate that “Our college/university was better perceived in the local community.”

The external benefits are not just limited to the local community. Among accredited business programs 29% believe “Partnerships with other colleges/universities increased,” 26% that “Partnerships with external organizations improved,” 22% find “Engagement with employers improved” and 18% that “Engagement with alumni improved.”

Expectations of enhanced external engagement are no less strong among those currently being accredited. Almost half (46%) expect “Increased enrolment of new students,” 42% that “Our business programs will be better perceived in the local community” and 35% that “Our college/university will be better perceived in the local community.”

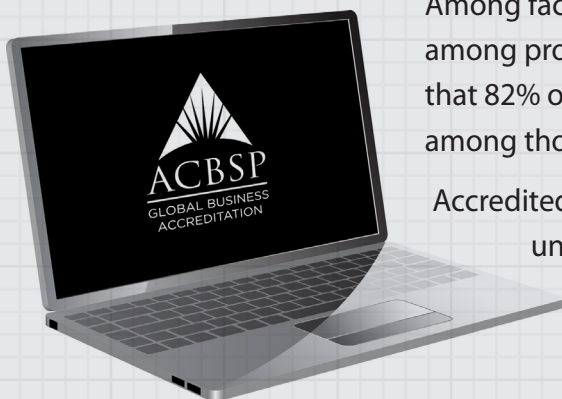
Similarly, 38% anticipate that “Engagement with employers will improve,” 25% that “Partnerships with other colleges/universities will increase” and 1 in 6 that “Engagement with alumni will improve.”

## Stakeholder awareness

Another measure of the value of accreditation can be seen in the awareness and understanding of accreditation among different stakeholders. Among accredited business programs 61% definitely or mostly agree that “Prospective students are aware of our ACBSP accreditation,” while 50% have the same view that “Prospective students value our ACBSP accreditation,” only 5% definitely disagree. Among those in the accreditation process, the numbers are similar” 58% believe “Prospective students are aware of ACBSP accreditation” and 56% that “Prospective students value ACBSP accreditation;” only 4% definitely disagree.

Among faculty the value of accreditation is more highly regarded than among prospective students. Accredited business programs suggest that 82% of “Faculty value our ACBSP accreditation,” rising to 89% among those currently being accredited.

Accredited business programs also suggest that 53% of “Employers understand the value of our ACBSP accreditation,” while among those currently in the accreditation process 63% share the same view.



# Communicating accreditation

Given the impact that accreditation has on marketing and PR as identified earlier in the report, it is interesting to see how business programs communicate their success when accreditation is received.

The vast majority of business programs (83%) use the ACBSP logo on their website and provide information about the accreditation. Almost two-thirds (65%) continue the visibility of the accreditation by using the ACBSP logo on their marketing materials. Just over half (55%) of the accredited business programs “Get involved in ACBSP activities e.g. committees, speaking at events, attending conferences, etc.”

However, there are perhaps further opportunities for many to communicate their accreditation and widen its impact among different communities. Just under half (47%) “Provide information about ACBSP accreditation in brochures for staff, students and employers” and just over a third (34%) “Highlight the ACBSP accreditation in press releases.”

Given the importance of digital media when communicating with all audiences, perhaps the greatest opportunities for stronger communication exist in this field. Just under a third (32%) currently “Highlight the ACBSP accreditation in our social media posts” while fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) “Include the ACBSP logo as a footer on all emails from the business college/university/department/division.”

## Conclusions

The impact of accreditation is clear. It is better to have accredited programs than unaccredited. Whether it is with prospective students, faculty, employers, alumni or local communities there are benefits to be had from the accreditation process.

It is this broad perspective that is perhaps most important. Although the focus of accreditation is about quality improvements in business programs, by taking a whole college/university and whole community approach, the benefits can be maximized.

In tackling accreditation, colleges and universities need to take a strategic approach from the very start. Benefits can be gained throughout the accreditation process. If colleges/universities are clear about the wider purpose of accreditation from the outset, then it will be easier once accredited to ensure ongoing benefits beyond the point of accreditation.

ACBSP can also help enhance the benefits of accreditation. Events and activities allow networking between those already accredited and those seeking accreditation, spreading best practices and inspiring innovation. ACBSP is also ensuring that once a business unit’s programs are accredited it can continue to benefit through the ACBSP Going Beyond Accreditation platform. ACBSP can share case studies from accredited business programs to illustrate the continuing power of accreditation and can gain brand awareness of the ACBSP accreditation across key stakeholders beyond campus boundaries, especially employers.



