

Title

Revolution: From AACSB Red Flags to Golden Stars

Abstract

This roundtable will focus on experiential learning of those that have engaged in the assessment of MBA programs for accreditation. Facilitators will share their experiences of working with 4 MBA programs that were viewed as having major AACSB issues to having “gold star” reviews in under 2 years. Participants will be encouraged to tell their own AOL improvement stories to generate themes that could be embraced by future AOL change agents. The themes identified by the group will focus on the most important factors in creating effective change to accreditation processes in order to not only meet but exceed expectations.

Key words

Accreditation, stakeholder engagement, change management

Facilitators will share their experiences of working with four MBA programs that were viewed as having major issues, by an AACSB review team, to having “gold star” reviews in less than 2 years. In other words, after the initial in-person review, a mid-cycle CIR2 was mandated to explain improvements on the MBA programs’ AOL processes in order to maintain accreditation. A change agent was brought in to correct the issues. After this short period of change, the new review team did not find any issues with these programs’ AOL processes, and in fact applauded the programs for their successful AOL plans.

Specifically, it was stated that the college “should develop a more sophisticated Assurance of Learning (AOL) process for its MBA programs. The MBA programs were reorganized three years ago. A new AOL plan was developed, but was deemed to be overly complicated and therefore, the plan was not implemented properly.” In other words, data and stakeholder engagement were severely lacking, and simplification would enable deeper reviews and more impactful innovation (2022 State of Accreditation Report). These programs were stuck in “a purely compliance mindset” (AACSB 2020 interpretive guidance) with lack of commitment from faculty teaching in the program to make the changes needed to achieve a continuous improvement culture. These programs had “a real opportunity to live the spirit of continuous improvement for the degree programs covered by AACSB accreditation” (AACSB 2020 interpretive guidance), if rigorous changes were able to be made.

### *The Case*

Steps were taken to make much needed changes to not only embrace continuous improvement but to also achieve the basics (i.e., systematic assessment). The program deemed it necessary to bring in a full time AOL coordinator that had experience running successful

accredited AOL programs. The goal of this new role was to achieve the above noted changes in under 2 years.

**Step 1 (first steps are important):** Instead of starting over from the beginning or trying to redesign the AOL plan from the top down, the Coordinator decided to implement the recently updated plan (CIR2), as best as possible, using what was developed by the program directors and the College's Graduate level curriculum committee. The purpose was to get as much systematic data as possible from the current plan, which would inherently show its strengths and weaknesses.

**Step 2 (the aha moment):** The information was shared with faculty stakeholders in each of the MBA programs, since "AOL is not about one or a few members of the faculty or staff doing most of the work. AOL should be faculty driven, with the majority of faculty involved at some level" (AACSB 2020 interpretive guidance). Therefore, annual all-faculty meetings were established for each program, where data (i.e., incomplete and inappropriate data was included for demonstration purposes) over each learning outcome (LO) was discussed holistically. These initial discussions helped demonstrate how useful the data actually was based on their current plan. The focus was on determining if the information could actually be used for making changes to the curriculum and getting a basic understanding of what it meant to close the loop. Closing the loop examples were also provided and discussed to demonstrate what the process should look like.

**Step 3 (get the right people in the room):** Getting faculty involved in the outcome data was the beginning for developing buyin, but it was not enough to establish real change. Therefore, a committee (MBA Programs Assessment Committee; MPAC) focusing on AOL for each of these programs was established. Membership consisted of two faculty members from

each program, as well as their program directors. The purpose was to oversee the assessment and accreditation process planning, assist with reviewing direct measures, propose recommendations, advocate for program improvement, and communicate outcomes for the MBA programs college wide.

**Step 4 (slowly make changes):** As stated in Accreditation Standard 8, “Learning goals and curricula [need to] reflect the currency of knowledge. Appropriately qualified faculty members [should be] involved in all aspects of curricula management, including the determination of learning goals and the design and ongoing revision of degree program content, pedagogies, and structure to achieve learning goals.” MPAC’s initial work regarded alignment from the ground up, ensuring: a) rubrics matched assignments, b) assignments and data matched associated LO, and c) LOs matched Program Learning Outcomes (PLO). There was not enough time to start from the top down, as there would have been too many associated changes and buy-in was needed. The bottom up process demonstrated where weaknesses were within the initial plan in a step-by-step manner. For example, when a rubric to assess an LO did not match an assignment or when an assignment was not directly related to the PLO.

**The Onsite AACSB Review:** Reports were written for each MBA program with initial data for each LOs included, the process for the LO clearly described, with changes to the curriculum indicated, future changes listed, and weaknesses to the process identified for updating included. Google drives for each program were developed as information directories that faculty in the programs had access to in order to enhance understanding and inclusion in the process. During the group interview stage, faculty were knowledgeable about the AOL process and changes due to their engagement in the annual meetings and their buyin was evident.

**Step 5 (time for significant changes):** After successfully completing the external review process, MPACs focus changed from bottom-up to top-down processes. In other words, the PLOs became the focus to ensure that the programs were prioritizing, the college's mission (2022 State of Accreditation Report), current topics, and continuous improvement. Developing effective PLOs and associated assessments came easily at this point, as the faculty in the committee now understood the purpose and bought into the changes so they were able to quickly envision the changes needed for each program. The overall faculty for each program also began to understand why changes were needed and how they could be facilitated. Proposals for changes and achieving votes needed for applying the change has become part of the process. Significant changes to the curriculum are now happening on an annual basis, leveraging the data from the accreditation process and effectively closing the loop for these programs.

**Key takeaways:** We believe that faculty engagement and buy-in are the most important factors for successful AOL implementation. In this case, there were no efforts around faculty engagement and buy-in for assessment. Program directors, and thus program faculty, focused on compliance; so as not to lose accreditation. The culture was not aligned with the true spirit of evaluation and accreditation (i.e., continuous improvement). Once the right people were involved (i.e., faculty from each program), excitement was generated around what could be done in order to improve the programs, and more time and effort were put into the AOL process; without the historical discord associated with assessment. However, before faculty were willing to get involved, they needed to understand how the process worked and what it could do for the programs (i.e., student learning).

*Session Learning Outcomes*

The roundtable will focus on learning effective and efficient practices for creating change in assessment processes and is targeted at administrators and coordinators of assessment, as well as faculty stakeholders. The Case Study will be discussed as a best practices situation, then will shift focus to experiential learning of participants. In other words, participants will be encouraged to tell their AOL improvement stories. Themes identified by the group will focus on the most important factors for creating quick and effective change to accreditation processes, in order to not only meet but exceed accreditors expectations.

*Session Description*

- Introductions and role with accreditation at your institution: 5 minutes
- Case study overview- going from “red flagged” to “gold stars”: 15 minutes
- Round table discussion: report out on improvements you have seen: 20 minutes
- Discuss possible themes: 15 minutes
  - Discuss what additional elements are essential for quick and effective assessment related change within academia.
  - Participants will come to an agreement on the top 3 elements impacting quick and effective change in accreditation processes.
- Closing remarks and insights by facilitator: 5 minutes

**References**

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