

Leveraging Centers for Teaching and Learning in Accreditation Review and Quality Assurance Processes

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Accreditation and quality assurance are high stakes processes that require wide-ranging input through self and peer review, with the goal of ensuring a high-quality education for students. This essay, part of the [POD Speaks](#) series, advises senior academic leaders to involve campus-based educational developers due to their unique expertise in working with faculty, assessing and improving curricula, and guiding organizational change.

The Challenge

Accreditation and quality assurance (QA) standards across governing bodies in the U.S. and Canada set minimum benchmarks and lay out rigorous, multi-layered criteria and peer review processes. Accreditation review and QA require extensive data and engagement on the part of the institution, from preparation through response. While U.S. accrediting bodies increasingly offer workshops, institutes, and materials to help organizations with accreditation review, leveraging relevant on-campus resources is also imperative. This article advises leaders about how and why to tap into campus-based [educational developers](#)—academic staff and/or faculty, often housed in centers for

teaching and learning, who focus on instructor development, curricular development, and organizational development. Educational developers have contextual and process knowledge that can lead to robust self-studies and enable ongoing institutional improvement in preparation for, and response to, accreditation review and QA.

Experts on accreditation often point out the necessity of providing professional development for faculty and staff charged with leading initiatives related to the assessment of learning outcomes, general education programs, and accreditation (Bresciani, 2006, 2007; Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Palomba, 2001). Shifting the conversation so that faculty perceive such work as valuable to them, their students, and the wider institution is also vital (Jacobson, 2010-11). Assessment work, particularly institution-wide efforts included in accreditation review and QA, must be meaningfully grounded in the goal of improving student learning; be authentic, involving genuine self-reflection; and be practical, with realistic timelines, ongoing work sessions, and resources to support

faculty efforts (Driscoll & Wood, 2007). Campus-based educational developers can help in all these areas.

How Educational Developers Can Help

Instructor Development

Whether explicitly required by accreditation standards (e.g., HLC, 2020; SACSCOC, 2018; WSCUC, 2013) or presented in the context of the institution's plans and structures, institutions need to provide evidence of instructor professional development. Teaching centers regularly provide such development. Center staff can offer a list of services provided to faculty, including topics typically addressed during instructional consultations; aggregate data on professional development programs and services, including participation rates; and data on the effectiveness and impacts of these programs.

Educational development units may also support the development of instructors beyond the realm of teaching. For example, holistic faculty centers may include support for scholarship, leadership, and other dimensions of faculty work, and may also assist in assessing the effectiveness of these activities (Kuhlenschmidt et al., 2010). Other centers focus on, and assess the impact of, instructor development for graduate student instructors, teaching assistants, peer learning assistants, and other educational roles (Beach et al., 2016). The evidence that centers collect about these and other professional

development activities (Beach et al., 2016; Wright, Horii, et al., 2018) can be instrumental in addressing accreditation standards related to instructor development in support of an institution's mission and priorities.

Based on ethical standards guiding the field of educational development, most center directors and staff focus on formative assessment—i.e., support intended to help instructors reflect and improve, with instructors retaining control and privacy regarding their individual development activities—rather than summative evaluation of individual instructors' teaching effectiveness (POD Network, n.d.). However, educational development units are champions for improving teaching effectiveness: they are well positioned to document institutional engagement in formative assessment (Wright et al., 2017) and advise institutions on structures and systems for evaluating teaching effectiveness (NASEM, 2020).

Curricular Development

Educational developers are used to working with departments, faculty leaders, and administrators to help design and assess overall program curricula (Beach et al., 2016). In most accreditation and QA frameworks, institutions must demonstrate that courses work together to enable student achievement of program-level learning outcomes, and assessments must provide

insight into student learning and actionable improvements. Departments may benefit from educational developer assistance when addressing these curricular and assessment requirements (Schroeder, 2007).

Within academic departments, educational developers can productively facilitate faculty engagement in a process of articulating program-level learning outcomes, creating curriculum maps that show how each course contributes to outcomes, and guiding shared reflection on assessment data and results. Center staff are skilled leaders of collaborative workshops and retreats on these topics (Allen et al., 2011; Metzler et al., 2017). Faculty involvement in these efforts is vital to accreditation and QA processes, reflecting faculty leadership and governance roles at the departmental and institutional levels (Christensen Hughes, 2007). However, educational developers serve as valuable partners in supporting curricular assessment; by “being at the table and having a significant role” during these localized curricular conversations, they hold a collaborative leadership role and contribute to institutional success (Schroeder, 2007, p. 122).

Organizational Development

Educational developers are also increasingly working at the institutional level, adopting a service model that is “responsive to campus contexts and needs and that facilitates both individual- and organizational-level change” (Wright, Lohe, et al., 2018, p. 41). Campus

leaders can leverage this experience in order to support accreditation review and QA processes. When an institution is preparing for a review, educational developers can help source data and make sense of the data requirements. Educational developers often hold an institution-wide perspective: they know which people and programs on campus can provide assessment data or campus-level information, and can help connect people across campus silos. Lieberman (2011) notes that educational developers are also expert translators (i.e., between the jargon of educational research, assessment, and accreditation, and disciplinary faculty perspectives and classroom experiences). Developers can help faculty and department heads interpret accreditation review and QA expectations and support them in demonstrating compliance and collecting evidence, including identifying useful information or artifacts that departments or the institution already collect.

Additionally, educational developers are coaches who can support and lead large-scale change initiatives to ensure goals and expectations are manageable and meaningful for the faculty, while also helping these initiatives achieve the transformation in student learning that accrediting agencies expect (Lieberman, 2011). For example, in the U.S., SACSCOC requires its member institutions to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP must come out of an institution’s own data-based

examination of its student experience, and result in a relevant and innovative multi-year project on a specific topic that is aimed at enhancing student learning or student success (SACSCOC, 2018). The HLC has an analogous expectation, and other accrediting and QA bodies require alternative formats for documenting plans and improvement strategies. Educational developers can help research, propose, implement, and assess the chosen QEP or its equivalent, and lead the sustainable implementation of successful teaching and learning practices that emerge from QEPs.

Once the accreditation or QA review has concluded, educational developers can also assist with follow-up and next steps. When institutions receive accreditation- or QA-related reports and responses, developers can help facilitate discussions for responding to the review. The responses may involve identifying changes to policies or procedures to meet teaching and learning standards when an institution is found to be out of compliance or are given recommendations for improvements (in the U.S.), and the discussions may need to focus on creating a culture that is open to change (Christensen Hughes, 2007). In Canadian quality assurance processes, continuous improvement is a core goal, and conversations and activities often occur year-round, not just at program review time. Educational developers can help to plan and facilitate such activities as well. Placing educational developers on committees or

task forces charged with oversight of accreditation allows campus leaders to leverage the developers' "knowledge of assessment strategies, teaching approaches, and communication skills," (Lieberman, 2011) as well as their project development know-how.

Conclusion

Overall, accreditation review and quality assurance processes can be daunting, but educational developers are key leaders who can help at various stages and levels, from individual instructor development to the institution's response to a review. Senior administrators can tap into their multi-faceted areas of expertise in the quest to achieve initial accreditation or re-affirmation of accreditation, as well as to engage productively in quality assurance and continuous improvement efforts.

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