False Perceptions of Quality? AACSB Accreditation Myth and Propaganda Marketing Strategies

Donovan A. McFarlane
Adjunct Professor of Business Administration, Department of Business Administration, BROWARD COLLEGE, 1000 Coconut Creek Boulevard, Coconut Creek, FL 33066.
Email: dmcfarla@broward.edu, Submitted on November 3, 2013

Abstract. This paper examines the perceptions of business school, college, and program accreditation relative to the practices and strategies of the AACSB to promote itself as the “Gold Standard” of accreditation. The author explores competition in business education accreditation by looking at some of the most notable players across the globe and their current institutional membership. The value of AACSB degrees are examined in terms value to individuals and the real value of accreditation via its impact on culture and institutional ability to adapt to change. The idea that accreditation, especially AACSB accreditation increases costs of attendance and operations is communicated, and the author argues on the comparative scholarly productivity of AACSB-degreed faculty members and their non-AACSB counterparts, bridge programs, and AACSB quality myths. The author discusses business practices by AACSB and its member institutions relative to prospective faculty or faculty applicants as involving deliberate exclusion and anti-intellectual practices. Arguing from the perspective of the need for flexibility, diversity, and innovation, the author asserts that other accreditation agencies for business embrace equally high or higher quality and standards than AACSB and that decisions on business school accreditation requires cultural, societal, and other considerations and should not just be relegated to propaganda or numbers and profitability gains for accrediting agencies.

Keywords: AACSB, ACBSP, Association of MBAs, EQUIS, IACBE, EFMD, accreditation, accreditation discrimination, accreditors, business education, exclusivism.
Introduction

Quality Definitions and Dimensions

Today’s consumers and producers are equally obsessed about and preoccupied with quality because quality matters! Quality matters because the global market is becoming more competitive every day, and companies are continually searching for new ways to gain an edge over their competitors around the globe, and global competition and deregulation in a number of industries is forcing companies to turn to quality in order to survive (Weinstein, 2012). Quality has been defined in numerous ways by scholars and marketers. However, one of the most comprehensive and universally applicable definitions of quality one can encounter is that by marketing management guru Philip Kotler, and Gary Armstrong, who define quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Johnson and Weinstein (2003) believe that quality must provide goods and services that completely satisfy the needs of both internal and external customers, and that quality serves as the “bridge” between the producer of goods or services and its customers. Thus, quality is mainly asserted by consumers and observers of consumption actions and utility.

The most prolific literature on quality and its dimensions and nature in the field of marketing can be ascertained from the extensive studies, theories, and writings of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. This includes the development of the SERVQUAL model to measure quality dimensions associated with services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), and business accreditation can be one such service. We can conceptualize quality in different ways and quality serves as a way of differentiating products and services in the eyes of consumers and competitors (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991) propose five major dimensions to quality of services: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. However, the most fundamental idea underlying quality is that it bears on a service’s ability to satisfy
or exceed the needs/wants and expectations of consumers. Quality is a perception, and perception is certainly not reality. According to Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011), “Perception is the process by which an individual gives meaning to the environment” (p. 104). Perception as a process involves organizing and interpreting various stimuli into a psychological experience (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2011), and our psychological experiences differ considerably. Thus, perceptions can be as inaccurate as stereotypes as they can be based on misinformation or successful and cultic propaganda marketing strategies. Among the three most popular business education accrediting agencies in the United States (AACSB, IACBE, ACBSP), AACSB is regarded as superior to its counterparts and competitors, as well as to some European business schools and programs accrediting agencies. This belief or perception has become somewhat of a fundamentalism in business education and has come to yield both positive and negative consequences for business education stakeholders.

**Accreditation Fundamentalism in Business Education**

When it comes to business degrees and business school accreditation, there is a lingering perception that AACSB schools and colleges are superior in standards and quality to their non-AACSB, IACBE, ACBSP, and other counterparts or competitors. However, this is simply not the case despite AACSB’s successful brand strategy and propaganda-based approach to marketing itself as the “gold standard” or as being the best and most respected business programs and schools accrediting agency in North America, if not globally. Each of the major three specialized accreditation agencies for business education and programs operating in the United States (IACBE, ACBSP, AACSB) are found to have equally strong and good standards or recommendations for quality assurance. The difference in perceptions stems solely from AACSB’s control over its accredited members and its ability to change and really affect their cultures to reflect AACSB marketing and branding strategy in dominating the national, regional, and global business school market. It is good that the Europeans have their own “gold standard” so that we are not all
bound by the cultic philosophy that a single or one dominant business accrediting agency imposes. For example, many non-AACSB doctoral degree holders desiring to teach in business schools and colleges that are AACSB accredited will find themselves having to complete AASCB Bridge programs which are expensive, many over $25,000, or must become AQ (academically qualified) where being professionally qualified (PQ) no longer suffices. Whatever the case, many colleges and schools of business that are part of the AACSB cult often consist of narrow-minded administrators and faculty who truly believe that having AACSB makes them something special other than just another school of business. However, they are not, and must like any other, equally adapt to change and manage knowledge effectively and deliver superior value outside of this cultic affiliation. This accreditation fundamentalism is leading to a lack of diversity in business schools and colleges, especially those already on the AACSB accrediting members list. It drives up educational expense for students and does not justify the ROI (return on investment).

AACSB Is No Better Than Other Business Accreditation

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) regards itself as “a global, nonprofit membership organization of educational institutions, businesses, and other entities devoted to the advancement of management education” (p. 1). The AACSB is a private independent for-profit accreditation agency without any formal governmental and other endorsements except those of its owners and member institutions that bolster its reputation and value in promoting their own products, services, and institutions. All institutions that are AACSB accredited constantly use this status as a means of gaining a competitive advantage over non-AACSB institutions such as those accredited by the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE), Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and other business program accreditation agencies from Europe and elsewhere. Whatever the case, the AACSB regards itself as, or has come to be regarded as “the gold standard” in business
accreditation. No doubt, its accredited members promote this slogan as a means of distinguishing themselves as better than and even superior to its competitors, when in reality, this is not the case since having a specific accreditation has little to no impact on the quality of education of a business school or any other school. While accreditation standards guide schools, the results of such standards are not necessarily evident in graduates. Personal encounters with numerous AACSB degree holders at all levels have not demonstrated them having any knowledge, ability, understanding, or intelligence above non-AACSB degree holders. Graduates from IACBE and ACBSP, as well as other non-AACSB accredited schools are equally knowledgeable, and in many cases, even more equipped in interpersonal skills since they do not have the propaganda accreditation stamp to speak for them and to demonstrate their skills.

AACSB business schools and colleges face the same problems and challenges as any other business schools and colleges, especially as far as real quality and value are concerned. Moreover, they are experiencing the same failures when it comes to business education and the quality and success of graduates save for a few elitist Ivey League schools whose names still represent a pass for those who can afford them. The challenge of applying moral imperative for effective market leadership remains elusive even in the revered AACSB schools (Cavico, Mujtaba & McFarlane, 2010) that “cost an arm and a leg” to attend. Accreditation has been a primary factor driving up the costs of education, and especially business degrees, whose market value is declining overtime, especially as more and more graduates enter the global economy. The cost of business education has skyrocketed over the years and AACSB has been a major adder to this increased cost because as soon as business schools and colleges decide to obtain or switch to AACSB accreditation they must start investing what can amount to millions of dollars for some schools. To offset this cost, they must increase tuition even when quality has not been increased by having the AACSB rubber stamp.
The PhD Graduates of AACSB Schools: Literacy and Interpersonal Skills

Often, many PhD graduates of AACSB business schools tend to have a snobby attitude as if they are more qualified and more educated than their colleagues, when this is really not the case. Personal encounters and exchanges with PhD graduates of AACSB schools over the past decade of higher education teaching and research have demonstrated the opposite. While many are highly specialized and hold more degrees in quantitative subject matters, they often have poorer communication skills and lack the ability to engage in transdisciplinary conversation or speak outside of their specialization with any significant authority, engagement, interest, or understanding. There are a few exceptions of course, mainly stemming from those who do not let this AACSB elitism get to their heads and who have nurtured a philosophy of learning that places equal value and respect on their colleagues from non-AACSB schools and value learning from them. Conversations with AACSB accreditation officers and managers have not yielded anything exceptional or unique about AACSB, and a deliberate study and comparison of the AACSB, IACBE, and ACBSP has found no significant differences in their standard expectations and requirements as far as business colleges, schools, and programs are concerned. That is, requirements leading to one agency being regarded as superior to others. Thus, the differences stem from strategic and market positioning, where the AACSB along with its accredited members that have a narrow culture where academic and intellectual discrimination is rampant, seek to promote their brands through deceptive marketing by communicating to students and the public that AACSB is in fact better than the other business accreditation agencies. This is simply not the case, but a propaganda marketing strategy that AACSB has brought a long way in becoming recognized above its competitors.

One strategy developed by AACSB and its member institutions is to foster a policy of exclusivism where business degree holders, including PhDs in business from non-AACSB accredited schools and colleges of business are not admitted under any circumstances to the faculty of AACSB accredited schools. McFarlane (2010) has demonstrated this in his writing by exploring numerous advertisements in the
Chronicle of Higher Education and on HigherEdJobs.com by AACSB accredited institutions that specifically demand and only accept AACSB degrees from prospective faculty and applicants. McFarlane (2010) describes this policy as anti-intellectual and lacking in diversity since modern global society requires diversity not only in quality, but in approach, training and education in order to maintain global competition, foster creativity, innovativeness and imagination. Thus, the AACSB and its members that practice this policy of exclusivism are engaged in a blatant form of intellectual discrimination which reflects a cultic narrow-minded practice in education. This robs students of cultic AACSB school of diverse quality.

As far as qualifications are concerned to teach in business schools and colleges, AACSB accredited schools are much more narrow-minded as they undervalue the combination of experience, education, and publications that prospective faculty have or their potential for such in lieu of that single silver bullet to penetrate the iron shield towards entering as a faculty member. They have on some occasions considered professionally qualified (PQ) applicants, but such individuals are usually given the lowest ranks and salaries regardless of their abilities, contributions, and accomplishment because they do not have a PhD, DBA, or other degree from an AACSB accredited school or college. This is an insult to the efforts and qualifications of others and demonstrates a lack of respect that has increasingly plagued the academy and its pathway through modern times. This same inability to understand individuals' unique identities and qualifications outside of the rubberstamp idealization of qualifications and degrees, has created many business schools and colleges with prima-donnas and whose only claim to a faculty position, tenure, or a better salary is having a PhD or DBA from an AACSB accredited school or college. However, it ends exactly there most of the times as these individuals feel exceptional and nurture an attitude that they have already earned their way by holding such a rubberstamped purported “Gold Standard” degree, so they need not prove themselves. In fact, many become unproductive overtime and must be forced through application of sanctions and policies to do what should come naturally – engage constantly and continuously in scholarly
activities. The fact is that AACSB accreditation or an AACSB accredited degree does not guarantee better quality of faculty or education for students.

**AACSB Accreditation: Brand-Quality Hype and Discrimination**

There is an exceptional level of hype regarding AACSB accreditation, and many simply do not understand the real benefits/losses and costs of pursuing and possessing AACSB accreditation. There are over 600 institutions and/or business schools and colleges holding AACSB accreditation according to the AACSB International website (www.aacsb.org; AACSB International, 2013). One of the major downsides of AACSB accreditation is that it leads to a decisively narrow-minded focus by both faculty and administrators. The AACSB seems to exert great cultural control and influence over its members such that their entire institutional culture can become extremely changed or altered to facilitate gaining and maintaining this so-called “gold standard accreditation”.

AACSB also seems to have little to no regard for its competitors including IACBE, ACBSP, EQUIS, or the like, and this is demonstrated in the aggressive exclusion approaches used by its accredited member schools in faculty recruitment and hiring. Often, prospective business school and college faculty browsing *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, HigherEdJobs.com, or individual accredited schools’ and colleges’ websites will encounter ads stating for example: “PhD or DBA from an AACSB-accredited institution” or “Doctorate from an AACSB accredited school” or “Degree must be from an AACSB-accredited institution” and the like. The worst thing about many of these universities and colleges specifying this requirement, is that they most often, and definitely will not consider equivalents such as IACBE and EQUIS, etc. Thus, the problem of accreditation discrimination arises with this practice (McFarlane, 2010). Apart from the issue of accreditation discrimination practiced by AACSB-accredited institutions or business schools and colleges, the narrow-mindedness which becomes endemic to their cultural and academic
approaches to education is a very serious issue as this creates inflexibility and saps curriculum and teaching innovation.

“Gold Standard” and Your Money

The AACSB “gold standard” ascription and hype are further promoted by several assumptions or generalizations that are emerging even on a wider scale. These assumptions include the following: (a) AACSB degree holders are more brilliant or brighter than non-AACSB degree holders; (b) AACSB degree holders are better prepared to conduct research; (c) AACSB degree holders or graduates are more scholarly productive; (d) AACSB degree holders or graduates make better faculty; (e) AACSB degree holders are more knowledgeable than their IACBE, ACBSP, etc, counterparts; (f) AACSB has a better quality assurance process, etc. Furthermore, these assumptions are not only parts of AACSB’s competitive marketing strategy, but they seem to emerge as cultural beliefs in the organization as evident and observable in several personal and academic conversations with AACSB representatives and fundamentalist believers and followers.

The major issue with AACSB schools and colleges is the practice of discrimination as many prospective and highly qualified faculty members are deprived of opportunities. Secondary issues of concern for educators revolve around issues of flexibility as changes in the global environment require curriculum restructuring and innovation. Another major issue is faculty diversity as the exclusivism practice of AACSB-accredited institutions to hire only AACSB degree holders further reduces the potential number of minority and especially black faculty in schools and colleges of business across the country. The affordability issue will lead to consideration of indirect discrimination on socioeconomic grounds since the fact that AACSB accredited colleges and schools are more costly prevents individuals from pursuing business degrees in such mediums only to be deprived of opportunities in higher education teaching as linked back to economic factors.

Interaction with hundreds of faculty members from various accredited business schools over the past decades, have demonstrated that the assumptions
above regarding AACSB degree holders or graduates compared to their counterparts are incorrect. Individuals should be treated according to their individual merits when it comes to faculty recruitment and hiring rather than based on whether or not they hold AACSB degrees. Those institutions that engage in this practice have a very narrow philosophy and are often led by narrow-minded prima donnas! Accreditation discrimination is simply wrong, and AACSB-accredited institutions as well as AACSB need to stop this blatantly anti-intellectual practice and propagandist strategy in the education market!

AACSB Bridge Programs: Another Expensive and Useless Venture

Many faculties across the United States who teach at AACSB-accredited schools and colleges and who do not hold a terminal business degree from an AACSB university before they became accredited, and those seeking entry, are jumping on the AACSB bandwagon for several reasons:

(1) Feelings of inferiority brought on by the AACSB culture hype;
(2) Feelings of inferiority based on the attitudes of their colleagues with AACSB doctorates;
(3) Narrowing institutional culture which imposes AACSB requirements on all faculty members, old, new, and prospective;
(4) Laziness as many deans, directors, and department chairs find it much easier to deal with one set of standards and uniform degree accreditation than others – for example, it is easier for deans and chairs to simply have all faculty with AACSB doctorates than have to compile portfolios or reports detailing AQs and PQs outside of AACSB degrees;
(5) Narrow-mindedness and myopia in business education leading to business schools and colleges with a narrow definition of academic qualifications;
(6) Turf protection as those in the academy with AACSB-accredited degrees find it favorable and advantageous to have that banner over their non-AACSB degree-holding colleagues;
(7) The need to be part of the in-group pushes some faculty to waste $25,000 or more to obtain an “AACSB Bridge Program Certificate” which many mistakenly describe on their resumes or CVs as a “Post-Doctorate” – far from the truth; it is a certificate complete in a short period of time for a ridiculous price;

(8) Social acceptance and drive for equal academic recognition force many non-AACSB doctorate degree holders to seek AACSB qualifications; and finally,

(9) The high level of competition for faculty positions in business schools and colleges has made the AACSB Bridge Program even more appealing, that is, within AACSB institutions.

Funny enough however, there are some non-AACSB schools and colleges that are asking prospective faculty members to have AACSB accredited degrees. These are desperate institutions that seek to jump on a bandwagon because they lack any innovation and strategy to develop their own brands and competitive advantage. This is truly sad because in doing so they often overlook exceptional talents because of the cultic pull towards AACSB fundamentalism.

**Busting the AACSB Quality Accreditation Myth: Stronger and Better Accreditors**

AACSB’s claim on being the highest quality business accrediting agency, or being perceived as such, owes all this to effective marketing and its effective leadership and management by a team of individuals who are not neutral in higher education, but who are committee members from various AACSB-accredited schools and colleges with a certain aim of pushing an agenda fueled by competition to discredit other business schools and colleges that are non-AACSB accredited. Often, the committees or reviewers for schools seeking the AACSB accreditation stamp are made up of deans and other administrators from universities and colleges that are already long-standing AACSB members. When such individuals fear a rising star in business education, they work to discredit it or undermine its bid to obtain the same accreditation that has remained their only competitive advantage. This is not speculation, but has happened to real schools and colleges, and save for not naming
any, accreditation competition of business schools and colleges does not simply end in the external market, but also runs deeply into the process of accreditation itself and who becomes eligible to obtain, and which business school or college eventually obtains the “coveted” and over-sensationalized AACSB accreditation.

Europe, Asia, and the Middle East have become the new playing grounds for AACSB as many business schools and colleges in these regions are jumping on the bandwagon to become more competitive with American institutions in terms of appeal for prospective students and perceived prestige. However, there is great suspicion that AACSB is watering down standards especially in its race to the Asian and Middle Eastern markets where it is currently accrediting business schools and colleges far below the standards of many of its accredited member institutions in the United States. This effort to absorb the Asian and Middle Eastern markets where many new colleges and universities, and especially many business schools and colleges are springing up and seeking equality in perception with their American counterparts, has made AASCB into “AACSB International” and seemingly, soon “global” as the agency engages in the business accreditation arms race not only with its American counterparts IACBE and ACBSP, but also with increasingly recognized and strong quality European accreditation agencies such as EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System); an international system of assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions in management and business administration run by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), which is regarded as “the world’s leading international accreditation for business schools” (EFMD.org, 2013, p. 1), the Association of MBAs, a London-based international organization that accredits postgraduate business programs at business schools worldwide, and which was established in 1967 by a small group of business graduates with the aim to raise the profile of business education and the MBA qualification in UK and Europe (Association of MBAs, 2013), among others that have equally high and even higher standards (McFarlane, 2012). These accrediting agencies for business schools, colleges, and programs in Europe and elsewhere need to increase their marketing efforts to diversify the
American business accreditation industry and crush the AACSB myth that has damaged authenticity and diversity in academia and business school cultures.

According to the AACSB’s website as of November 2013, “There are 687 member institutions that hold AACSB Accreditation [and] overall, nearly 50 countries and territories are represented by AACSB-accredited schools” (AACSB International, 2013, p. 1). The Association of MBAs states that it accredits MBA, DBA and MBM programs at over 200 business schools in over 80 countries (Association of MBAs, 2013), while EQUIS accredits schools and programs of business among EFMD’s 800 member organizations from academia, business, public service and consultancy in 81 countries (EFMD.org, 2013). In the United States, AACSB’s American competitor, IACBE (International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education) claims over 200 members and 800 accredited programs in the United States and throughout the world (IACBE, 2013), and its other major American competitor, ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs) claims nine regions, representing 44 different countries, 8,000 individual members and 828 member educational institutions, of which 529 had ACBSP accreditation and 220 had candidacy status in 2010, and 134 member institutions were located in the United States at the time (The ACBSP Gateway, 2013). Thus, when we look at business education accreditation, the AACSB, though it has a strong standing as a result of a robust marketing campaign and practices of exclusion, academic accreditation discrimination, and unfair competition by its member institutions, we cannot say that it is number one or the best or highest quality and standard out there, as this is certainly not the case. However, in marketing, perception goes a long way in winning consumer confidence and market position and strong brand recognition (Solomon, 2004; Keller, 2003; Keller, 1998). The brand image that the AACSB and its national-regional and global competitors have built will not be enough to convince future business students and institutions of value as the changing environment of the future calls for swift adaptation to uncertainty and change.
The Value of AACSB Degrees

Many individuals seeking to obtain a business degree fall for the propaganda marketing strategies of AACSB and its accredited members, so much that they are ignorant of its value and worth and its impact on costs. The fact is that if you are not going to pursue teaching with your business degree in the entrenched American business college and business school settings, then you do not need an AACSB degree. AACSB degree is highly valued among its own accredited members of colleges and universities as part of self-sustaining strategies and a way of claiming higher prices for their products or business degrees. For those simply obtaining a business degree or business education for promotion in corporate America or for personal development, they most definitely do not need an AACSB accredited degree and certainly should not incur the excess costs or price for this degree as employers in corporate America will not generally understand or care about accreditation at the programmatic level, but rather at the national and regional levels. Moreover, only those who have plans to teach at U.S. business schools and colleges and some newly emerging AACSB followers in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East need to become preoccupied with incurring the costs for an AACSB accredited masters or doctorate degree in business because otherwise, such will not matter in corporate America or the business world unless the degree itself is from one of the top Ivy League or business schools such as Harvard Business School, MIT Sloan, or another.

Many business school administrators and staff selling their AACSB accredited degrees do not make the above facts clear to prospects or existing students, and this can significantly affect their career and professional plans. Prospects or existing students need to be informed about the implications and meanings of accreditation relative to their professional decisions to pursue a business degree at a specific institution, and how this will potentially impact opportunities in any particular region or industry. This requires leading business schools with what Cavico, Mujtaba, and McFarlane (2010) call an “educational and moral imperative for market leadership.” The fact is that the AACSB degree
graduate does not hold a more valuable degree than an IACBE, or ACBSP, EQUIS, or other degree graduate in American society or elsewhere, it is just a perception based on good marketing and the prejudices of member institutions of the AACSB as a response to competition. What matters most, and should always matters the most, is the individual holding the degree as individuals’ abilities and learning differ; their levels of knowledge and understanding, their abilities to apply the knowledge, and how creatively and innovatively they can think and develop new ideas and adapt to changes in the current and emerging business environments.

**AACSB Accreditation and Accreditation Bid Destroy Authentic Institutional Culture**

Many institutions aiming for or considering applying for AACSB accreditation should think long-term on what is important to them, society, and their graduates because it is no guess when the author of this paper asserts that AACSB accreditation and accreditation bid destroy authentic institutional culture, as he has witnessed it personally and professionally. Applying for and acquiring, or becoming qualified for AACSB accreditation is a very traumatic experience for institutional cultures, especially today’s business schools and colleges. They will need to completely uproot their authentic practices and most times, eliminate what makes them unique, and even dilute or give up distinct competences and competitive advantage in the business education industry. Moreover, after having uprooted their foundations and cultures to accommodate this process, there is no guarantee of obtaining and keeping AASCB accreditation. Thus, institutions eyeing AACSB accreditation should ask themselves: “Is it really worth it?” “How will obtaining or having this accreditation affect flexibility and adaptation?” (McFarlane, Mujtaba & Cavico, 2009), “What are the benefits for us and our students and graduates?” “How sustainable is the business model required under AACSB standards and accreditation?” What are the impacts on existing organizational culture and how will this affect faculty, staff, employee and student morale and customer value?” among other questions.
AASCB accreditation and accreditation bid affect customer value in business schools and colleges. Institutions of higher education like any businesses should aim to do one thing that decisively affects both short-term and long-term success: design and deliver superior customer value by adding value with each process, program and decision (Weinstein, 2012). However, when accreditation such as that of the AACSB stymies and affects the ability of business schools and colleges to swiftly adapt to changes and integrate new initiatives into their existing models of instruction and education, or make program changes given the undulations of the external market environment, value for students and faculty alike is most definitely affected. Thus, culture and value changes should be foremost considerations on the minds of business school deans and administrators who are considering and pursuing the path of AACSB accreditation. This author has seen its damaging impact on organizational culture in the forms of instability, increased interpersonal and organizational conflicts, mission and vision incompatibility, faculty and staff morale, and monetary and financial challenges that emerge with increased costs and the expenses of this form of accreditation – it is by far the most expensive form of business accreditation that institutions can pursue, and this means eventually increasing tuition and other associated costs of operating and running a successful business school.

**Implications for Practice**

As a result of its successful brand positioning and the desperation of many of its accredited members to corner the market, both AACSB and its accredited institutions have imposed upon business education a belief that if one does not hold an AACSB-degree then their degree is of no academic value and is subpar. This is truly not the case since only a handful of the business schools and colleges across the globe hold AACSB accreditation. While we have to admit that AACSB is good at marketing and branding itself, we must also point out that perhaps its competitors need to do the same in order to become equally competitive and as “highly” perceived. The fact is that the majority of people enrolled in colleges and schools
today are learning little, so much that having a hype such as AACSB accreditation is important to them because when they can boast that they hold a degree from an AACSB school, especially those in academia who teach at business schools and colleges, very few can boast or possess the knowledge to back the degree.

It is the great challenge of our 21st century educational institutions – mass credentializing with little learning that we must effectively resolve. While the leaders of AACSB will deny allegations of accreditation discrimination, their silence certainly demonstrates that they facilitate and passively and implicitly encourage it in a bid to dominate the business schools and programs accreditation market in the United States, and promote AACSB in an unreasonably competitive manner, and also maintain the myth of the “Gold Standard” in business school accreditation. The AACSB with its current positive market perception has managed to penetrate business programs and schools accreditation markets in countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

References


