Comparing Educational Accreditation Standards in Selected Professional Fields

Colleges and universities are discussing the purposes and processes of specialized program accreditation. Proponents of program-level accreditation argue that external validation of quality by appropriate professional groups fosters continued excellence, assures the public of program quality, provides programs with internal negotiation leverage, promotes interinstitutional communication, and enhances the prestige and credibility of the professional program [11, 19]. Critics, however, cite accreditation’s drain on faculty time and resources, potential suppression of educational creativity, inconsistent interpretation of standards, and the absence of data demonstrating relationships between accreditation standards and educational outcomes [7, 17].

Despite the continuing discussion about the merits of specialized accreditation, little evidence has been gathered about the relationship between accreditation standards and educational excellence in professional education programs. In addition, there have been few examinations of accreditation standards across professional fields to compare their emphasis on elements of professional education that purportedly contribute to program quality. This lack of research is surprising in

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view of concerns facing professional study with advancing technologies, increased knowledge, an uncertain financial support base, and shifting public sentiment. This study represents an initial, exploratory effort to develop the research base by: (1) comparing accreditation standards across selected professional study fields, (2) relating the explicitness of accrediting standards to independent faculty perceptions of accrediting rigor, and (3) relating explicitness of accrediting standards to faculty reports of preferred and actual outcomes and educational activities.

**Background**

Specialized accreditation began at the turn of the current century, and today about fifty specialized accrediting agencies exist [6, 11, 19]. Some observers attribute an increase in specialized accrediting agencies since 1952 to availability of federal funds for programs recognized by an accepted agency [3, 16]. Whatever the reason, the emergence of additional agencies undoubtedly has fueled criticism based on commitment of time and other resources by institutions or programs seeking accreditation for many programs. The often lengthy specialized accreditation process is similar across varied programmatic fields and includes an evaluative self-study report addressing published accreditation standards, peer review, usually through an on-site visit, and finally, a decision about whether accreditation should be granted. In all cases, accreditation is a process primarily involving volunteer experts in the specialized fields [11, p. 17].

Despite this overall similarity, accreditation processes and practices differ for various professional fields of study on several dimensions: for example, the nature of the accrediting body, the defined purposes of accreditation, the degree of institutional investment in seeking external review, the impact of accreditation status on the program and its graduates, and the types of designated standards. Because agencies circulate draft standards for review before final adoption, these variations undoubtedly reflect ideologies and instructional methodologies that differ among fields of study as well as the structure and sponsorship of the accrediting agency [20, pp. 30–31]. Each profession emphasizes certain intended outcomes, educational processes, and administrative and financial support bases relevant to the culture of that profession. Implicitly then, accreditation assists in defining professional education.

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1 Apparently the Council on Rehabilitation Education is the only COPA-approved accrediting agency that does not always conduct a site visit.
parameters and, thus, the nature of the profession. Reciprocally, a profession’s value orientation and priorities are reflected in accreditation standards that establish minimal expectations for the structure, processes and outcomes of education.

One primary goal of specialized accreditation is to foster excellence through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing it [20, p. 22]. Specialized accreditation is believed to play an important role in identifying and encouraging minimal standards of program quality. Most often, educational effectiveness is inferred by accreditors through program reputation, resource acquisition, program structure and content, faculty qualifications, program goals and student achievement of specified outcomes. Recently, accrediting agencies have been accused of devoting insufficient attention to student outcomes as indicators of educational effectiveness [6, p. 199]. Indeed, outcome assessment may be unavoidable in view of intensified demands for educational and fiscal accountability by institutions, government, and funding agencies [5].

In comparing the specialized agencies to regional accreditors, Young states they are “more likely to have fairly specific standards relating, in large part, to performance skills considered desirable” [20, p. 24]. Nonetheless, the recent expansive volume on accreditation edited by Young contains no information on the extent to which the competence of graduates is actually assessed or compared across programs by any of the specialized accreditation agencies. Rather, in that volume, Andrews describes several current innovations and experiments to show that, particularly among specialized accrediting associations, “the shift in focus toward a more explicit educational outcome approach is occurring” [2, p. 353]. At a time of increased emphasis on accountability for preparing qualified professional practitioners, the lack of clarity concerning outcome evaluation fuels the continuing discussion about the merits of accreditation.

Study Purposes

The purposes of this study were to:

1. compare accreditation standards of ten professional preparation programs in order to examine the relative emphasis placed on goals, structures, processes, and outcomes typically viewed as related to quality determination;

2. explore relationships between the occurrence of explicit outcome statements in accrediting standards and independently derived faculty perceptions of accrediting rigor;
3. ascertain whether occurrence of explicit statements of student outcomes in accrediting standards appears related to the emphasis faculty place upon such outcomes, the extent to which faculty believe the outcomes are achieved in their programs, or the specific activities faculty report to achieve the outcomes.

Overview of Study

This study examined published accrediting standards and compared them with existing survey responses from faculty in ten professional fields using (1) an established set of dimensions for comparing accrediting standards [10] and (2) a recently published set of generic professional preparation outcomes [13]. In part 1 of the study the investigators used content analysis to generate “explicitness scores” indicating the extent to which student outcomes were stated or implied in accrediting standards for each field. In part 2, faculty perceptions of accrediting agency rigor, emphasis on outcomes, and educational activities designed to achieve outcomes were compared for the most explicit and least explicit fields.

The ten professional fields were selected to reflect established programs at the baccalaureate or higher degree levels that allow the graduate to obtain an entry-level position generally thought of as professional: architecture, business administration, engineering, education, law, library science, nursing, pharmacy, journalism, and social work. All of these fields have accrediting associations that belong to the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and are also recognized by the United States Department of Education as authorities with respect to the quality of education in their respective fields.

Study Frameworks

Student outcomes. The outcome model, derived from and further explored through professional preparation literature [13, 14], specifies two types of professional preparation outcomes: (1) professional competences and (2) professional attitudes. Although all professional programs value these interrelated outcomes, various outcomes may receive different emphasis, and the activities designed to achieve them may vary substantially among professional fields of study [12, 15]. Statements describing the outcomes in this model and the percent of faculty in ten professional fields who would place very strong emphasis upon them are given in table 1.

Program goals, structures, and processes. The seven dimensions
TABLE I
Educational Outcomes Used for Comparative Analysis of Accreditation Standards and Survey

1. **Professional Competences**
   
   A. Conceptual Competence: A graduate should understand the body of knowledge that is basic to practice of the profession, that is, the theoretical base or the professional knowledge base (92.3%).
   
   B. Technical Competence: A graduate should be able to perform the fundamental skills or tasks required in professional practice (78.4%).
   
   C. Integrative Competence: The graduate should be able to integrate theory and practice; that is, select the knowledge and skills applicable to a particular professional work setting or problem (91.7%).
   
   D. Contextual Competence: The graduate should understand the social, environmental, economic, and cultural setting in which the profession is practiced (80.3%).
   
   E. Adaptive Competence: The graduate should demonstrate the ability to anticipate and adapt to changes in society and technology that are important to the profession (74.5%).
   
   F. Interpersonal Communication Competence: The graduate should be able to use written and oral communication effectively (91.6%).

2. **Professional Attitudes**
   
   A. Professional Identity: The graduate should have developed an identification with the professional role (67.2%).
   
   B. Professional Ethics: The graduate should know and apply ethical principles and professional conduct standards of the professional field (87.1%).
   
   C. Career Marketability: The graduate should not only meet basic standards for entrance into the profession (such as licensing or certification where they exist), but also be a competitive applicant for a beginning position (72.6%).
   
   D. Scholarly Concern for Improvement: The graduate should be willing to cooperate with or participate in research or other scholarly activities that improve professional practice (48.0%).
   
   E. Motivation for Continued Learning: The graduate should actively seek opportunities to update professional knowledge (78.4%).

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*For each outcome, the percent of faculty members in ten professional fields who judged the outcome as worthy of very high or extremely high emphasis (response of 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) in first degree programs is given.

used to examine the goal, structure, and process components of the accreditation standards were slightly modified from dimensions that Petersen [10] constructed to compare standards among fifty-two agencies associated with the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation. The dimensions used by Petersen were: (1) mission and goals; (2) organization, administration, and governance; (3) faculty; (4) curriculum and instruction; (5) students; (6) library; (7) facilities and equipment; and (8) financial resources. In order to assess the current validity of this classification scheme, three raters who were not familiar with the Petersen study read the accreditation standards of the selected ten professional fields and independently developed a set of dimensions that would appropriately represent emphasis in the standards on goals, structure, and processes of the educational program. The dimensions derived by the three raters and those from the Petersen study were similar. However, we modified Petersen’s scheme by collapsing the library, facilities, and resources categories into a single resource and
facilities dimension and adding an additional dimension that addressed evaluation activities. After these adjustments, the seven broad dimensions relating to program goals, structure, and processes were those listed in table 2. Table 2 also provides the specific categories for seven of the dimensions (a total of forty-seven categories) that were used in comparing the ten sets of accreditation standards. The eighth dimension, outcomes, had eleven categories as described earlier in table 1.

**TABLE 2**
Dimensions of Program Goals, Structures, Processes Used for Comparative Analysis of Accreditation Standards

1. **Mission and Goals:** (1) program mission and philosophy; (2) goals and objectives; and (3) organizational structure (3 categories).
2. **Faculty:** (1) faculty preparation; (2) competence in teaching and research; (3) faculty mix based on rank, academic background, demographics, part-time vs. full-time status; (4) faculty workload; (5) faculty expectations in teaching, research, service, and practice; (6) faculty development; (7) promotion and tenure policies and procedures; (8) faculty compensation; and (9) faculty evaluation (9 categories).
3. **Students:** (1) admission, recruitment, and transfer; (2) retention and progression in the program; (3) graduation requirements; (4) program support for students; (5) student service support; (6) student mix and diversity; (7) opportunities for developmental experiences; (8) student evaluation policy and procedures (8 categories).
4. **Curriculum and Educational Programming:** (1) balance of theory and practice; (2) required core courses; (3) areas of specialization; (4) educational time requirements; (5) course sequencing; (6) the existence of nondegree and continuing education programs; (7) curricular evaluation procedures; (8) course revision and experimentation; (9) curricular design; and (10) contextual study (10 categories).
5. **Program Administration and Governance:** (1) governance structure and involvement of members of professional academic community; (2) administrative functions; (3) intraorganizational relationships with other units; (4) administrator qualifications; (5) administrator compensation; (6) evaluation of program leadership; and (7) program budget (7 categories).
6. **Resources and Facilities:** (1) adequacy and availability of library resources; (2) instructional centers and materials; (3) physical facilities; (4) affiliating practice agencies; (5) field resources; (6) fiscal resources; (7) equipment; (8) supplies, and personnel support (8 categories).
7. **Evaluation:** (1) evidence of policies and procedures promoting total program evaluation through ongoing and systematic evaluation; (2) long-range planning (2 categories).

**Study Method**

Part 1 — **Comparing accreditation standards.** Published accrediting standards were obtained from each of the relevant accrediting agencies listed in Appendix 1. In those fields that offer professional entry at either the baccalaureate or graduate level (for example, social work, education), the analysis focused on the baccalaureate level standards.

A content analysis was conducted by three raters who had participated in several training sessions to become familiar with the dimensions and categories in table 2. Each profession’s standards were read
several times. Then, using the list of categories shown in tables 1 and 2, the raters checked those which were: (1) explicitly stated, (2) implied by curriculum content, or (3) generally referenced in the accreditation standards. A 90 percent inter-rater reliability was achieved. An "explicitness score" was assigned to each set of accrediting standards by assigning five (5) points for explicit statements, three (3) points for implication in curriculum content, and one (1) point for general reference. Examples of the "explicitness" of standards are presented below:

**EXAMPLE:** Explicitly Stated Outcome
(Interpersonal Communication Competence)

*Engineering* — "The development of communication skills should be demonstrated by student work in engineering courses."

**EXAMPLE:** Implied Outcome through Curriculum Content
(Contextual Competence)

*Nursing* — "Legal, historical, political, social, economic, and ethical aspects of nursing are included in the curriculum."

**EXAMPLE:** Generally Referenced Outcome
(Scholarly Concern for Improvement)

A paragraph in the architectural accrediting standards discusses the need for architecture to extend to new applications and become more responsive to human needs and aspirations.

*Part 2 — Comparing explicitness of accrediting standards, faculty perceptions of accrediting strength, and faculty reports of outcome emphasis and related educational activities.* In order to determine whether explicitness of outcomes is related to an independent measure of accrediting rigor or to faculty views of appropriate outcome emphasis, outcome achievement, and specific educational activities, data were drawn from a survey recently conducted to validate a broader conceptual framework for the study of professional programs [15]. The 1985 survey, based on random selection of program units from a national stratified sample of identified programs in the ten fields, was completed by deans and department chairs as well as distributed by them to a faculty sample proportional to program size. The 2,217 timely and useable faculty responses from 732 of the 1,046 sampled programs represent a response rate of 69.8 percent of solicited programs and 46 percent of the desired faculty sample. Program response rates by field varied from 56 percent to over 95 percent, while faculty response rates varied from 31 percent to 62 percent. Responding programs, located in 346 different institutions, closely resembled the survey population. (Additional details regarding the survey population, sample and response are available in other published articles or from the authors.)
The questions posed on the basis of the survey data and the derived measures used follow:

Question 1: Are accrediting agencies which explicitly state student outcomes in their standards perceived by faculty to be as rigorous and enforcing as those that do not have such explicit statements?

A two-item scale measuring the rigor that faculty in each of the ten fields attributed to their specific accrediting agency was constructed based on responses (on a seven-point Likert-type scale) to the following two strongly correlated (0.71) items:

Accreditation standards for professional preparation programs are rigorous.

Accreditation standards for professional preparation are enforced.

Based on the entire non-missing survey response (N = 2,110), the rank order of professional fields on this measure of perceived accrediting rigor was compared with the rank order based on the explicitness score assigned to accreditation standards.

Question 2: Compared to fields in which student outcomes are not explicitly stated, do faculty in fields whose accreditors state outcomes explicitly, (1) believe more emphasis ideally should be placed on these outcomes; (b) perceive that their own program does place more emphasis on the outcomes?

Available survey data contained faculty views (expressed on seven-point Likert-type scales) of the emphasis their field ideally should place on each of the eleven outcomes (see table 1) and the amount of emphasis they believe their own program actually places on each outcome. Based on a data subsample of randomly selected equal groups of respondents (N = 60) from each professional field, table 1 gives the percentage of respondents who judged each outcome to be highly or extremely important. (Clearly, because all outcomes were considered important, the eleven cannot be seen as entirely independent dimensions). For the purposes of this analysis, these data were converted to standard scores. Deviations of the standard scores of each field from the total group mean (N = 600) were examined to determine if faculty members in fields with explicit accrediting standards placed more or less emphasis on the outcomes, ideally or in their own programs, than the combined groups of professional faculty.

Question 3: Do faculty members in fields with explicit outcome statements in accrediting standards cite specific activities intended to achieve the out-
comes more frequently than do faculty in fields where standards are less explicit?

For eight of the eleven outcome statements in table 1, faculty responding to the survey had been asked to give a brief description of educational activities used to achieve each outcome. In constructing the survey, the researchers did not ask respondents to suggest activities to achieve conceptual competence, technical competence, and career marketability, because the responses seemed likely to lengthen the survey instrument unduly without producing new information of interest.

It was possible to classify 13,433 responses by outcome, by professional field, and by specific type of educational activity. For outcomes judged as very important by faculty in most fields (communication competence, integrative competence) 85 percent or more of all respondents contributed a descriptive item. The range of percent responses by field around this average (75 percent to 98 percent) appeared consistent with faculty views of program emphasis rather than biased by a nonresponse tendency for any field.

For use in the current analysis, we derived from educational activities reported by 2,217 faculty respondents, a gross measure of faculty tendency to recall and report specific activities potentially linked to outcome achievement. This measure, which for ease of reference we call "percent mentions," is a percentage calculated by dividing the total number of specific mentions contributed by faculty in a field by the number of respondents in that field (number of respondents ranged from 90 in architecture to 440 in education). Because some respondents mentioned multiple activities for each outcome, the percent mentioned may be greater than 100 percent but expresses the relative tendency of faculty in each field to specify activities. The measure, "percent mention," should not be interpreted to imply that the outcome actually is achieved by the specific activity; the relative percentages merely indicate the readiness with which faculty members recalled and mentioned activities they believed were so intended.

The analysis compared percent mentions for professional fields with high and low explicitness scores.

Study Results

Part 1. The results of the content analysis of accrediting standards, presented in table 3, show the percent of the total number of possible mentions within each of the eight dimensions in each profession's
standards. Although, based on the frameworks used for the analysis, the number of possible mentions in each category differs, these data indicate that, relative to other program dimensions, specific educational outcomes are mentioned infrequently in the standards. In only four fields, architecture, engineering, law, and social work, were outcomes mentioned explicitly. Standards in education, journalism, and nursing contained general references to the overall professional performance of the graduate without mentioning specific behaviors or outcomes.

In contrast to the relatively infrequent mention of outcomes, the majority of categories within each of the seven other dimensions (reflecting program goals, structures, and processes) were mentioned explicitly by the accreditation standards in each of the ten fields. The dimension acknowledged most comprehensively was mission and objectives (with 87 percent of the possible categories mentioned across the ten fields) followed by resources and facilities (76 percent), curriculum and educational programming (70 percent), faculty (72 percent), students (60 percent), administration and governance (60 percent), and evaluation (55 percent). Based on these ten fields, specialized accreditation agencies do not strongly emphasize student outcomes (24 percent) as components of written accreditation standards. The accreditation standards in architecture were the primary exception, addressing ten of the eleven student outcomes listed in the outcome model through explicit, behavioral statements. The social work standards appended a curriculum policy statement that combined descriptions of outcomes and curricular content.

In view of these findings summarized in table 3, we considered the possibility that the accreditation standards might be referring to student outcomes in a less direct fashion. In fact, some accreditation literature emphasizes that programs are responsible for defining their own outcomes; the accrediting process may most effectively determine whether the program has appropriate objectives, has the resources needed to accomplish the objectives, and provides reasons to believe that it will do so [4]. Given these statements, some accreditation standards might not specify even generally accepted educational outcomes for professional programs, but instead, might seek demonstrations of capacity to accomplish locally defined objectives or might imply certain outcomes through curricular standards.

Thus, the accreditation standards were reexamined for their possible implicit as well as explicit emphasis on the student outcomes included in the generic framework employed for this study. Table 4 illustrates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Field</th>
<th>(1) Mission and Objectives</th>
<th>(2) Faculty</th>
<th>(3) Students</th>
<th>(4) Curriculum</th>
<th>(5) Administration/Governance</th>
<th>(6) Resources/Facilities</th>
<th>(7) Evaluation</th>
<th>(8) Outcomes</th>
<th>Total Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>

* These accreditation standards did not mention any of the 11 possible specific student outcomes but did mention "professional performance of graduates"
<table>
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<th>Professional Field</th>
<th>Conceptual Competence</th>
<th>Technical Competence</th>
<th>Integrative Competence</th>
<th>Contextual Competence</th>
<th>Adaptive Competence</th>
<th>Inter-Personal Competence</th>
<th>Prof. Identity</th>
<th>Prof. Ethics</th>
<th>Career Marketability</th>
<th>Motivation for Continued Learning</th>
<th>Scholarly Concern for Improvement</th>
<th>Percent of Outcomes Mentioned</th>
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<td>E</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % of Fields Mentioning Outcome | 100% | 100% | 90% | 90% | 40% | 60% | 40% | 80% | 30% | 30% | 30% |

Key: E = Explicitly stated as student outcome; I = Implied as student outcome; GR = Generally referenced in the standards; * = Not mentioned, implied, or referenced in the standards.
the findings of this comparison with regard to each of the eleven student outcomes. All of the sets of accrediting standards implied a concern for the conceptual and technical competence of students (100 percent). Nine of the ten sets of standards mentioned integrative and contextual competence (90 percent). The importance of interpersonal communication competence was implied less frequently (60 percent). With the exception of professional ethics (80 percent), the accreditation standards focused much less often on professional attitudes, implicitly or explicitly, in their written accreditation standards than on professional competences. Additionally, adaptive competence, which implies flexibility toward future changes in professional practice, was implied or mentioned only by four of ten fields: architecture, business administration, library science, and social work. In architecture, the explicit emphasis on student outcomes (both competences and attitudes) is evident. Whereas architecture, engineering, and social work most frequently noted student outcomes in their standards, the library science and law accreditation standards made the fewest total implicit and explicit mentions of outcomes. No claim is made that this set of eleven generic outcomes is exhaustive or that other appropriate outcomes may not be included in accreditation standards. In fact, a very specific view of outcome phrasing might lead, as in the architecture standards, to listing of many behaviorally stated outcomes encompassed by these eleven broad categories.

Part 2. Table 5 shows the rank order of accreditation standards in the ten professional fields examined based on explicitness of eleven outcomes (maximum explicitness score = 55). Architecture (51), social work (45), and engineering (36) are, by far, most explicit in mentioning student outcomes; library science (15) is least explicit even when implied mention is included. Other fields received relatively equal and low explicitness scores of 18–20.

Also shown in table 5 are the percentages of faculty in the survey data base who felt that the accrediting agency in their field (1) has rigorous standards and (2) enforces those standards. The means and standard deviations of the scale constructed by combining these two strongly correlated items are given. Faculty members in nursing, engineering, and social work perceive their accrediting agencies as most rigorous. Library science and journalism faculty see their agencies as least rigorous. A limitation of using existing survey data is that not all faculty may have had close contact with accrediting processes thus calling the validity of their views into question. Indeed, not all of the faculty included in the survey teach in accredited programs so the percep-
tions of strength may be based on different exposures. As shown in table 5, only 47.4 percent of the business faculty surveyed were members of accredited programs while 97.3 percent of the law faculty were. Even so, comparisons of the accrediting strength measure for faculty in accredited and nonaccredited programs indicated high agreement among these two groups except in journalism where faculty in nonaccredited programs perceived the accrediting agency as considerably weaker (\( \bar{x} = 3.93 \)) than did those in accredited programs (\( \bar{x} = 4.71 \)).

Judging from the different rank orders in table 5, faculty perceptions of accrediting rigor do not seem to be systematically associated with accreditation standards that are explicit with respect to outcomes. Engineering and social work rank high in both explicitness of standards and in rigor as perceived by faculty. Library science, without explicit standards, ranks low in faculty perception of agency rigor. Nursing, however, is viewed as rigorous by faculty and does not have explicit standards. Architecture, with the most explicit standards, is a relatively nonrigorous accrediting agency as viewed by architecture faculty.

The outcome model used in this study includes several professional competences and attitudes that are discussed in literature on professional education as desirable but which traditionally may not have received much attention in professional programs. In order to be sure that our results reflected emphasis on outcomes actually considered important by professional educators generally, we calculated a second explicitness score (Explicitness-2 in table 5) based on only those seven outcomes judged very or extremely important by 75 percent or more of survey respondents in the combined ten professional fields. This more restricted analysis did not include the following outcomes: adaptive competence, professional identity, career marketability, and scholarly concern for improvement of the profession. Despite the restriction to only those outcomes considered of paramount importance, the rank order of the professional fields with respect to their explicitness of accrediting standards remained essentially the same.

In table 6, three fields with quite explicit outcomes statements in their accrediting standards (architecture, engineering, and social work) are compared with three fields that do not have explicit standards with respect to deviations from professional faculty views generally regarding: (1) ideal emphasis on each outcome, and (2) their own program’s emphasis on each outcome. To illustrate, along with library science, which has the least explicit standards, we have selected nursing, which
## Table 5
Rank Order of Accrediting Rigor in Ten Professional Fields by Two Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Field</th>
<th>Explicitness-1 Score</th>
<th>Explicitness-1 Rank</th>
<th>Explicitness-2 Score</th>
<th>Explicitness-2 Rank</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent from Accredited Programs</th>
<th>Percent of Faculty Agree Accrediting Rigorous</th>
<th>Percent of Faculty Agree Accrediting Enforced</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. Wk (Bach.)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libr. Science</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Means</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5.14</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.56</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Explicitness score was calculated by assigning the following weights: Explicit Outcome Statement = 5; Implied Outcome = 3; General Reference to Outcome = 1.

**Two-item scale: 1 = Low Accrediting Rigor; 7 = High Accrediting Rigor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Architecture</th>
<th>Social Work</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Journalism</th>
<th>Library Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Own Program</td>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Own Program</td>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Own Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Competence</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Competence</td>
<td>-0.55*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-0.33*</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Competence</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Competence</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.52*</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-0.66*</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Competence</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Compet.</td>
<td>-0.73</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.34*</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Identity</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-0.56*</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Ethics</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Marketability</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Concern</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motiv. for Cont. Learning</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** All the figures are standard scores based on equal random subsamples of 60 faculty from each field.

*Outcome explicit.
has the highest faculty perceptions of accrediting rigor, and journalism, which has the lowest. If the collegial process of devising explicit outcome statements and adopting them in the standards elicits faculty consensus or influences program objectives, we would expect faculty in fields with explicit statements to place high emphasis on the stated outcomes with respect to other fields. In fact, with the exception of social work, faculty in fields with most explicit outcome statements viewed those outcomes as relatively less important than did professional faculty generally and thought their own programs also placed less emphasis on achieving them. That is, the standard scores for architecture and engineering showed that means for these fields were considerably below the mean for 600 faculty, ranking these fields low among professional fields on ideal outcome emphasis and perceived program emphasis. These patterns indicate no clear association between explicit outcome statements and faculty emphasis on the same outcomes.

For professional fields with most explicit and least explicit student outcome standards, table 7 shows the percent mentions of specific activities faculty believe achieve each outcome. These data provide no evidence that when outcomes are explicitly stated in accreditation standards, faculty recall and mention related educational activities more frequently. Fields with the least explicit standards seemed nearly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Percent Mentioning Specific Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most Explicit Standards$^1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Competence$^3$</td>
<td>120.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Competence$^3$</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Competence$^3$</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Competence$^3$</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Identity$^3$</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Ethics</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Concern</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motiv. f. Contin. Learning</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$Architecture, Social Work, Engineering  
$^2$Business, Education, Journalism, Nursing, Pharmacy, Law, and Library Science  
$^3$Percent mentions may be greater than 100 percent because some respondents mentioned multiple activities.  
$^4$Outcome mentioned by at least two of the highly explicit fields.
as likely to mention specific activities intended to achieve an outcome as the fields with the most explicit standards.

Conclusions

Although professional educators stated in a survey that they attached strong importance to each of eleven outcomes, few specialized accrediting agencies have made these outcomes explicit in their standards. In contrast, in the ten professional fields whose accrediting standards were examined, substantial emphasis was placed on each of seven other dimensions: mission and goals, faculty, students, curriculum, administration and governance, resources and facilities, and evaluation. Based on these results, authors who call for increased attention to student achievements at graduation[9, 17] have identified an existing deficit. Those who believe such an emphasis is desirable would cite the accreditation standards in architecture, written as learner-centered behavioral objectives, and in social work (a curriculum policy statement) as interesting models of specificity for other accreditors to consider. Not all will agree, however, that such models have merit. Some observers with whom we have shared our results speculate that accreditors emphasize curriculum dimensions rather than outcomes because long experience indicates that students who follow a particular curriculum achieve certain outcomes. Other observers have suggested that continued emphasis on program mission and goals is more appropriate than an emphasis on outcomes. They believe that accreditors should continue to endorse a flexible approach, allowing each program to state its own objectives and demonstrate their achievement in an acceptable way.

Currently, it appears there is insufficient evidence to objectively assess the value of making outcomes explicit in accrediting standards. When we compare those few fields with quite explicit standards (architecture, social work, engineering) with those far less explicit, we could identify no association of explicitness with perceived rigor of the accrediting agency, with endorsement of the specified outcomes by faculty in their field, with faculty estimates that outcomes receive greater emphasis in their programs, or with clarity of educational activities assumed to achieve the outcomes. Although, theoretically, faculty are active participants in formulation of accrediting standards, we do not know whether they base their perceptions of accrediting rigor on reading the standards, on observing accreditors in operation, or merely on rumors along the academic grapevine. Both the source and nature of
faculty perceptions of their own accreditors and concern about accreditors' lack of attention to student outcomes are topics that appear ripe for further investigation.

References


15. ———. “Faculty Priorities for Student Competence in Ten Fields of Professional

APPENDIX: Specialized Accreditation Agencies for Selected Professional Study Programs

Architecture
National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc.

Business Administration
American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business

Education
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Engineering
Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology

Journalism
American Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

Law
American Bar Association

Library Science
American Library Association

Nursing
National League for Nursing, Inc.

Pharmacy
American Council on Pharmaceutical Education

Social Work
Council on Social Work Education