



Since 1916, more than 500 institutions of higher education in 30 countries have earned global accreditation for their business schools from AACSB International, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Last year, as AACSB celebrated its 90th anniversary, specialised industry accreditation – which for years has been the norm in the medicine, law, and engineering – becomes more prominent for business education as more and more companies take a hard look at the value they receive from degree and non-degree-based executive education for their employees. European CEO recently spoke with **Jerry Trapnell**, executive vice president and chief accreditation officer, about AACSB's role in the continuous improvement of business schools around the world.

The importance of accreditation

Why is AACSB accreditation important for business schools and what makes it different from the more familiar governmental degree-granting authority held by educational institutions?

The landscape of business education is significant and it continues to grow on a global scale. With an estimated 9,000 business schools worldwide, accreditation by AACSB International is more important than ever and should be viewed as an important means of separating truly high quality institutions from the vast multitude of providers. Earning AACSB accreditation is a demanding process that requires a three-to-seven-year commitment, one that is significantly different from the baseline expectations of governmental degree-granting authorities. In short, it consists of a detailed rigorous peer review/evaluation of a business school that focuses on mission fulfillment, quality faculty and students, and assessment of student learning outcomes to assure quality.

The business education and corporate communities have held AACSB accreditation in high regard ever since a group of prominent business school leaders, representing Harvard, Yale, Wharton, and others gathered in Chicago in 1916 to find common ground on guidelines that would set high standards for business schools. Five years later, AACSB accredited its first group of schools, and we have been growing ever since. Celebrating our 90th anniversary in 2006-2007, AACSB accredits more than 528 business schools in 30 countries.

Recently, it was reported that Intel, a manufacturer of the semiconductor chips that power computers around the globe, would require employees studying business to select an AACSB-accredited school in order to be reimbursed for their tuition expenses. What does this mean for AACSB?

It is a reassuring affirmation that our commitment to continuous improvement with our schools has resonated with corporate human resource departments. Companies that reimburse employees for their educational expenses are becoming increasingly more sophisticated consumers. They are taking a closer look at the choices employees make when they enroll in degree and non-degree programmes. They feel that AACSB-accredited schools offer top-notch faculty, are at the frontiers of issues facing business enterprises, and offer cutting-edge programmes that respond to the needs of modern business. The fact that AACSB-accredited schools must maintain their accreditation through a rigorous review process every five years is also appreciated by those thoughtful companies who share our commitment to quality and continuous improvement.

What does business school accreditation mean in terms of real benefit to European executives faced with critical hiring decisions?

When a business school earns international accreditation from AACSB, it

is comparable to a company's quality processes meeting ISO 9000 standards—an external validation of quality and a commitment to continuous improvement. The fact that business schools volunteer to hold themselves up against international standards and participate in serious self-assessment and in-depth peer review is a testament to the value of the experience and the schools' commitment to quality. This is a powerful message to global companies that understand competition and product differentiation in an international context.

Beyond quality, there is concerted emphasis on continuous improvement, our ongoing mantra at AACSB. Having the assurance that a group of educational institutions is committed to the same high quality global standards provides human resource professionals with the confidence that their executive education dollars are being spent wisely. It also means that students are being educated by business schools that understand the need for a global perspective and the ability to impart that perspective to graduates. Today's employers want managers

How do AACSB standards keep pace with the ever-changing, rapid pace of global business—for example, corporate scandals and the teaching of ethics?

The commitment to continuous improvements within AACSB supports an ongoing process of reviewing and updating standards and processes, and ensuring that they remain constantly relevant for high-quality business education. For example, in 2004, AACSB produced a report titled 'Ethics Education in Business Schools,' which spurred a renaissance in the discussion of teaching ethics to future business leaders. The report advanced the discussion of ethics as it pertains to our accreditation standards and prompted our schools to invigorate their commitment to ethics education at both the individual and organisational levels. Since then, AACSB schools have demonstrated their commitment through enhanced emphasis on ethics education and corporate social responsibility in academic programmes,



who can hit the ground running and are as much at home doing business in China, Africa, North America, or South America, as they are in the EEC.

We believe AACSB accreditation effects the way companies recruit new employees. More and more companies are taking a discriminating look at the business schools where they do their recruiting. We believe that graduates from AACSB-accredited institutions return full value to the companies that hire them because, beyond merely preparing students to contribute to their employer, AACSB-accredited schools instill in their students qualities that bring ongoing value to hiring organisations and their communities.

How is it that AACSB is able to offer accreditation standards that apply to such a broad range of educational institutions around the world? Some might think this is an impossible task.

We realise that the ESSEC Business School-Paris is not the same as SDA Bocconi in Italy, and that University of Sydney in Australia isn't the same as the Wharton School. AACSB recognises that each business school can have its own unique mission, defined in its geographical, historical, cultural, and geo-political context. Within these contexts, different business schools can deliver very high value and quality educational experiences. It is the application of AACSB standards against each business school's stated mission that allows us to celebrate the diversity of the 528 business schools in 30 countries that hold AACSB International accreditation. This is perhaps the single most important reason why AACSB accreditation is in high demand throughout the world

assessment processes, research agendas, and outreach activities. AACSB schools are committed to offering courses that help business students learn how to resolve ethical business and managerial problems.

What differentiates AACSB accreditation from other European-centred accreditation bodies such as EQUIS and AMBA?

Founded in 1916, AACSB International is the largest and longest serving global business school accreditation association. EQUIS and AMBA also offer business school accreditation and some business schools choose to earn all three. AACSB and EQUIS accreditation are both institutional in focus and cover all business programmes offered at an institution at all levels—baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. AMBA accredits solely at the individual programme level, focusing on MBA and MSc programmes. We have great respect for other accrediting bodies and we encourage business schools to seek an international accreditation that will best serve their interests.

We believe that our standards set very high expectations focused on a well-articulated mission that is supported by strategic decision making. AACSB accreditation requires sufficient, highly qualified faculty and staff, curricula with appropriate learning goals, and the ability to evaluate student learning against those goals. We have an excellent volunteer network of highly experienced deans to support schools that enter the accreditation process and, throughout our standards, overarching emphasis on how schools prepare students to be ethical, global managers. 