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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

On behalf of the editorial board and research committee, we are pleased to share this issue of the *Access Journal* with you!

In this issue, you will be presented with a series of articles covering a wide array of topics, including graduation rates, assessment, accreditation, leadership, and a variety of lessons learned in the "trenches" of leading at a branch campus.

In addition, for the first time we are expanding the scope of *Access* to include thought pieces and non-scholarly submissions. Doing so helps broaden our content and provides more opportunities for participation in our journal.

Our goal has not changed though—we continue to pursue the advancement of the body of knowledge regarding branch campuses. We know that there is much more to learn and many questions to answer.

As you read this issue, please consider how you might contribute your knowledge, experience, and expertise in a future issue as we work together to build awareness and offer insight into the world of branch campus administration.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Couch, Ed.D.
Palm Beach Atlantic University, Orlando
Co-Editor

Cyndee Moore, Ed.D.
University of North Georgia, Oconee
Co-Editor

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Performance Matters: A Call for State, Regional, and National Standards for the Assessment of Branch Campus Graduation Rates

Faimous Harrison, Ph.D.
Dean
California State University, Stanislaus, Stockton Center, fharrison@csustan.edu

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Performance Matters: A Call for State, Regional, and National Standards for the Assessment of Branch Campus Graduation Rates

ABSTRACT

Branch campuses play an important part in postsecondary degree attainment by providing place-bound students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in different geographical regions access to education that is convenient. Currently there are minimal performance assessment standards for branch campuses. Only a small percentage of the institutions report their individual survey results to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) separately, or to other reporting agencies. The limited research available does not provide educators, researchers, policymakers, and community stakeholders the opportunity to assess performance, or make the most appropriate data-driven decisions to support student achievement and success. This paper is a call for state, regional, and national standards for assessing branch campus graduation rates.

Key Words: assessment, graduation rates, degree completion, branch campus, satellite campus, regional campus, center, twig, leaf, parent campus, offsite location, place-bound

INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are no state, regional or national standards that examine the performance of offsite campus locations (known as “branch” campuses) on a regular basis. Branch campuses are important in expanding access to education, services, and advance credential attainment for place-bound students (Atkins, 2011; Bird, 2014; Ebersole 2010; Mullin, 2012; Norton & Pickus, 2011; Schneider & Yin, 2012). Without current state, regional, or federal requirements for institutions to report branch campus data statistics separately, it is a challenge to determine continuity and quality assurance at these offsite learning facilities. Thus, assessment data that represent branch campuses on a broader scale is the first step in quantifying and understanding performance (Bird, 2014; Burke, 1994; Dew & Nearing, 2004; & Fong, 2012).

Historically, data-driven research has provided educators, researchers, and policymakers information to make decisions and align resources that support institutional effectiveness and accountability (Allen, 2004; Head, 2011; Love, 2009; & Nichols, J. & Nichols, K., 2000). As the cost and value of higher education increases, stakeholders want transparency and accountability to ensure that institutions are utilizing resources appropriately. The institution’s academic standards, quality and consistency of the teaching and learning environments, and competitiveness should remain consistent at all geographic locations, including branch campuses (Bok, 2006; Gaston, 2014; Hauptman, 2012; Seybert, 2006; & Suskie, 2004).

Annually, thousands of students attend and graduate from branch campuses throughout the United States (Bird, 2014; Cooper, 2011; Dengerink, 2009; Mindrup, 2012). The majority of literature associated with branch campuses are qualitative studies centered on governance structure; the development and creation of new campuses; leadership qualities, attributes and preparation of new campuses; autonomy or lack of self-government; and the expansion of international and overseas branch campuses. Additional literature examines multiple geographical locations within the same institution, branch campus administrators, faculty and student perspectives of the learning environment, or operational and student affairs issues from a state-wide perspective (Conover, 2009; Fonseca & Bird, 2007; Gossom & Pelton, 2011; Jordan, 2011; Krueger, Bebko & Bird, 2011). What is lacking, are state, regional, and national standards that assess the performance of branch campuses.

BRANCH CAMPUSES AND ACCESSIBILITY

Branch campuses are individualized, specialized, and unique postsecondary learning environments with specific purposes, and strategically placed in geographic locations to offer educational and workforce development opportunities for the communities they serve. The term branch campus is an umbrella term that represents an educational facility where a student can earn a degree or certification at an offsite campus location that is an extension of a parent campus, or an extension of another offsite campus location. Branch campuses serve both traditional and nontraditional students, with place-bound adult learners most often the majority. Each location offers a different array of academic programs, services and resources to support student achievement, success, persistence, and degree attainment. Traditional and nontraditional place-bound students appreciate the opportunity and flexibility to pursue an education while staying employed, maintaining family or other personal obligations that would not allow them to relocate (Bauman, Wang, DeLeon, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez, & Lindsey, 2004; Bird, 2014).

Originally designed to serve students in targeted geographical locations and to keep pace with demand, some branch campuses have morphed into global learning organizations (Lane, 2011; Lewis, 2012). With the advancement of technology and increased demand for high-skilled labor, branch campuses can integrate vast multimodal program offerings, and employ a variety of learning theories within the curriculum (Jolliffe, Ritter, & Stevens, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Siemens, 2006; Stravredes, 2011). A branch campus, as defined by the United States Department of Education (DE), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), is "a campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary, and located in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers organized programs of study, not just courses" (DE, 2012, para. 9). Each branch campus or site can be unique with its own organizational and leadership structure, operations and logistics, academic program offerings, and services available to students and the community; and hence demonstrating the importance of better defining these institutions (Krueger, Bebko, & Bird, 2011; Shaw & Bornhoft, 2011). According to Strange and Banning (2001), "there are no clearly defined criteria for an ideal environment that can meet everyone's requirements" (p. 3). Therefore, better understanding these learning communities and their impact on teaching and learning, student persistence and completion are essential (Magolda, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

The U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 recognizes that every postsecondary institution that is granted privilege to take part in the Program Participation Agreements and participate under Title IV of the Federal Student Financial Assistance program is required to have an individual OPE identification number if they are reporting separately (DE, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Education this OPE identification is a "6-digit number followed by a 2-digit suffix used to identify branches, additional locations, and other entities that are part of the eligible institution (DE, 2012)." The majority of branch campus performance and assessment data are combined with the parent and other campus locations, and the results are reported as a collective average. However, the mean average of the data that is being reported is not always an accurate reflection of the individual campuses, and especially the smaller campuses that are usually the branch campuses. Therefore, the picture portrayed from the data for these offsite learning facilities are often misleading. In the Report and Recommendations from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #1 Data Reporting Structures and Clustering (2012):

> IPEDS has traditionally allowed the reporting of combined data for multiple campuses for all survey components except Institutional Characteristics (IC). This type of reporting is referred to as "parent/child" reporting. When combined reporting for any component occurs, the parent institution (normally the main campus) submits a combined report, which includes data for its own (main) campus plus data for one or more branch campuses (these branches, because they do not report data separately, are referred to as "children"). When this happens, the data file includes the parent record, which contains the data, and the child record(s), which contain no data. The parent/child reporting structure may be more complicated for Finance, where the Finance data file may reflect partial data reported by children (p. 1).

There is an abundance of research that supports the need for creating an atmosphere and campus culture that fosters scholarship at the parent or main campus (Altbach, 2013; Bok, 2003; Burgstahler & Cory, 2009; & Christensen & Eyring, 2011). However, this is not the same for branch campuses. It is important to offer the appropriate amenities and services that nurture academic achievement, persistence, and completion. Branch campuses strive to accomplish these objectives with minimal resources.

Furthermore, the students and communities they serve may need a different arrangement and amount of support services to support the goals that are aligned with and advance the institutions mission (Gupton, 2010; Komives & Woodard, 2003; Kramer, 2007; Newman, Couturier, Schroeder, 2011; & Scurry, 2004). Strange and Banning (2001) assert that "institutions themselves bear responsibility for the design and creation of campus environments and are arranged appropriately for meeting educational purposes" (p. 20). This statement also holds true for the different types of branch campuses. As Altbach (2011) states "What is a branch? There is no generally accepted definition" (p. 1). Therefore, by better defining these diverse offsite locations, educators are able to serve students at a fraction of the cost of a traditional or non-branch campus (Bird, 2014; Schuman, 2009). According to College Board, "Tuition and fees constitute 40% of the total budget for in-state students living on campus at public four-year institutions and 20% of the budget for public two-year college students who pay for off-campus housing". The majority of branch campuses do not have a wide variety of extracurricular activities, including sports teams, Greek Life, etc. Thus, many of the parent campuses do not require students to pay for these activities and services that are not available to them at the branch campus. However, there are some generalizable terms that pertain to the different categories or types of branch campuses, and their unique characteristics.

BRANCH CAMPUS: UMBRELLA TERM FOR OFFSITE LOCATION

Within the context of this paper, the terms "branch campus," "regional campus", "regional center", "child", "center", "satellite campus", "extension campus", "institute", "twig", and "site" are interchangeable. The one common thread within this overarching umbrella term in academia is "branch campus" and, within this family there are identifiable subdivisions that separate one from another. The subdivisions are based on the size of the location, organizational structure, services and amenities, geographic location, student demographics, and other factors. It is also possible for a branch campus to be established one way, but over time, transform into another type of campus (Cooper, 2011).

BRANCH CAMPUSES AND IPEDS

The United States Department of Education (DE), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) federal reporting performance requirement guidelines are for all postsecondary institutions that accept federal assistance or financial aid (2008). The NCES does not require institutions to report branch campus graduation rates or demographic data separately (NCES, 2012; NPEC, 2011). Assessing branch campus institutional and student demographic characteristics, including student persistence, time-to-degree completion and graduation rates without this information is a concern. The DE noted additional research and analysis is necessary for a) transparent postsecondary research data to meet accountability demands; b) efficient data reporting information exchange; c) clarity and consistency in the quantitative analysis that is reported; d) specifying and illustrating data results accessibility; and e) a system implemented where different state and federal agency working groups can collaborate or utilize a more efficient or seamless system in order to identify the issues that need to be addressed (Berkner & Choy, 2008; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2007; Radford, Berkner, Wheeles, & Shepherd, 2010).

Institutions are mandated to report enrollment, demographic, and completion data to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) that receive Title IV funding. IPEDS calculates graduation rate performance as “the rate required for disclosure and/or reporting purposes under Student Right-to-Know Act. The rate calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the revised adjusted cohort” (NCES, 2012). Therefore, 150% of normal time to graduate from a two-year college is three years and for a four-year college or university is six years for a bachelor’s degree.

The majority of postsecondary institutions that manage branch campuses report their overall institutional average for all campus locations as one mean number, and not for each individual branch campus. However, *Complete College America* reports “states and colleges need data that enable them to establish a fair baseline, show progress over time, make meaningful comparisons, and provide accountability…” (2014, para. 2). With no mandated requirements, it is a challenge for educators, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders to assess graduation rate performance at branch campuses in comparison to other higher education learning institutions on a state, regional, and national scale. Although the NCES does not require postsecondary institutions to report branch campus data separately to IPEDS, and only a small percentage voluntarily disseminates branch campus data, one way to determine how well these institutions are performing is assessing outcome performance measures including graduation rates (AACC, 2011; Brandon, 2009; Callan, 2012; Ebersole, 2010).

THE NEED FOR BRANCH CAMPUS ASSESSMENT

As I recognize that graduation rates do not effectively measure learning, the Center for an Urban Future (CUF) reports (2012) that it does give the “perception that low graduation rates demonstrate a failure of the system” (Lax, p. 1, para. 2). Graduation rates is also a commonly used performance outcome measure in academia (Head, 2011; Hernon, Dugan, & Schwarts, 2013; Seybert, 2006). McPhail (2011) adds “completion must be embedded into the fabric of the institution: Relationships. Rigor. Relevance” (p. 3.). Branch campuses typically have more nontraditional students and adult learners, including working adults, primary breadwinners within the family, students twenty-five years or older, and students that are returning back to college than traditional non-branch campuses on the the parent campus (Bash, 2003; Cross,1981; Fungaroli, 2001; Levin, 2007; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). There is a need to have institutional performance assessment outcome data to determine their successes and to identify areas for improvement (Bird, 2007; Pennucci & Mayfield, 2002; Schuman, 2009). The parent campus often determines academic programs, class offerings, student support services, and resource allocation. The decisions made may not accurately reflect students' needs, and therefore, may not maximize the potential and impact on student success, including graduation rates (Suskie, 2004; Veres, 2012; Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012).

Branch campuses strive to maximize the potential for student achievement and success; however, without quantifiable data, it's hard to determine achievement (Jordan, 2011). It is equally important, for institutions to consistently identify and minimize obstacles and barriers that impact students' progress and success (Donaldson & Graham, 2011). One of the challenges for branch campuses is to provide adequate resources, meaningful experiences and opportunities for engagement, and ensuring students' educational goals are met (Adkins, Barnette, Omundson, & McInosh, 2004; Mullins, 2010). Another challenge is understanding how these institutions are performing when it comes to graduating students. Listed below are some comparative analysis measures that institutions can employ to assess the performance of branch campus graduation rates:

1. Comparative Data Analytics – Parent and child per academic discipline and services;
2. Comparative Data Analytics – Compared to other locations within the state, regionally, or nationally;
3. Comparative Data Analytics – Program transfers for the different campus locations;
4. Comparative Data Analytics – Student demographics for each campus location;
5. Course evaluations;
6. External consultant reviews and stakeholders' feedback;
7. Faculty and staff feedback;
8. Student feedback;
9. Graduation Rate Excellence and Assessment Trajectory (GREAT) initiatives and goals;
10. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System;
11. Surveys and focus groups;
12. Activity and event feedback, including New Student Orientations;
13. Student exit interviews;
14. Undergraduate and graduate trends in enrollment, retention and graduation rates; and
15. National annual reporting data

Similar to many of the NCES studies, institutional control, size, student enrollment status, demographics, urbanization, and geographic region are six institutional variables reported to IPEDS. There is a need for additional research that provides a better understanding of graduation indicators and metrics, and the institutional factors that may influence these rates (AACC, 2013; Atkins, 2011). There is value in implementing a student-success-centered action plan based on student outcome assessments (Jordan, 2011). Enrollment at branch campuses has increased in recent years, and it is imperative that institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders respond to the needs of both current and future traditional and nontraditional students on these campuses (Harms, 2011). Consequently, by better understanding the branch campus environment and student graduation rates, educators are more prepared to quantify student persistence, completion and achievement (Dunn & Mays, 2005; Fungaroli, 2000, Ramaley, 2012). This may also help determine an institution's performance and may uncover barriers that impact student achievement (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leninbach, 2007; McWhirter, 1997).

Many of the decisions that involve branch campuses are made by individuals that do not work nor are located at the site. There are times where decision makers may be misinformed or have little if any, direct involvement with the affairs at the offsite campus locations (Dowd & Grant, 2006; Fonseca & Bird, 2007). As documented by Krueger, Bebko, and Bird (2011) "it is notoriously difficult to pull together reliable information on branch campuses" (p. 6). The majority of the research examines branch campuses from a qualitative perspective, and state, regional and national quantitative data are absent from the studies (Cech, 2010; Conover 2009; Krueger, 2009; Norby, 2005). Other studies report data collectively from a single campus, cluster, or group of campuses associated with one institution, locally, nationally, or internationally (Altbach, 2013; Johnson, 2012; Jordan, 2011; Olswang & DeGive, 1999).

Data-driven decisions are important for effective student outcomes and achievement (Heritage, 2014; Lawler & Richardson, 2006). Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander (1996) indicated "assessment information must be applied systematically toward improvements if it is to have a lasting impact on the institution" (p. 55). The minimal state, regional, and national studies that focus on graduation rate performance at branch campuses validatethe need for additional research and this calls for state, regional, and national standards for assessment. For these reasons, outcome assessment data are important institutional effectiveness indicators to advance scholarship for all students. The data can help identify campuses and student groups that may need additional resources or specialized support. Graduation rates may identify trends that are essential to student achievement and relevant for institutional accountability (Reno, 2012).

Strange and Banning (2001) argue that "striving for efficiency is a mandate of public and private trust for colleges and universities, as the competition for support increases and pressures for accountability persist, both from sources that fund them and consumers that use them" (p. 77). With more adult learners, traditional and nontraditional students attracted to these offsite locations, it is imperative for there to be a systematic approach for branch campus assessment. However, without meaningful and transparent data, institutional leaders, policymakers, and the public may not fully appreciate the contributions and challenges branch campuses have in supporting scholarship (Cross, 1981; Ezarik, 2009; Gossett & Condoulis, 2008; Kent, 2012). Performance matters, which is the reasons why I call for establishing state, regional and national standards for the assessment of branch campus graduation rates.

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Lessons Learned

Charles Bird, Ph.D.
Vice President for University Outreach Emeritus
Ohio University, bird@ohio.edu

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Lessons Learned

ABSTRACT

Branch campuses have various missions and significant differences in enrollment and programs. Funding approaches, services provided, and levels of local authority vary widely. More than in the past, institutional leaders recognize that they need to increase enrollment from new audiences, and they are seeking ideas to make that happen through branch campuses, online programs, or both. Questions about structure, funding, services, and autonomy are on the table. In this article, I share lessons learned since publishing *Out on a Limb: A Branch Campus Life* (Bird, 2014), and after visiting a variety of campuses, with an eye toward helping branch leaders identify critical topics or strategies that will contribute to success or failure. Topics include the significance of origins in shaping current perspectives, the importance of demonstrated support from the president and at least one other influential champion on the main campus, development of revenue sharing models, and the need to emphasize local control over course scheduling and marketing/recruitment.

INTRODUCTION

After a 34-year career associated with regional or branch campuses, I published a book based on my experiences, both as a faculty member and as an administrator (Bird, 2014). Beginning in 2009, I also visited many universities and a few community colleges, as a consultant, speaker, and meeting facilitator. Visiting institutions across the country, and in a few cases in other countries, was enlightening. Each institution had its own story to tell; each faced its own set of challenges and opportunities. Nevertheless, there were common themes and ever-present frustrations.

This article draws on my personal experience, as well as my visits and other contacts to share lessons learned along the way. In some cases, I will emphasize points also made in the book, but which stand out to me as being especially important; in other cases, I will point to significant issues that drew my attention since the book.

ORIGINS MATTER

When I began consulting with other institutions, perhaps the most surprising observation was the extent to which the origin of branch campuses matter. Given the lack of literature on best practices, branches emerge largely to meet local institutional needs. Often the objective is to grow enrollment and to generate new revenue, but sometimes the goal is more to respond to political pressure or to block the advancement of other institutions.

Depending on objectives and the broader institutional mission, branches sometimes serve primarily as feeders to the main campus or to facilitate degree completion, when commuting to the main campus is impractical. Sometimes programming is narrow and specific to, say, business programs, programs for teachers, or to serve some audience tied to local employers. Always, institutional culture shapes early decisions, for better or for worse.

A critical aspect of branch campus origins lies with the appointment of full-time faculty. In my opinion, faculty do more to shape the culture of an institution than any other group, so how they perceive their role makes a difference. Are at least some faculty members hired on the tenure track, and, if so, is their tenure evaluation based on the branch campus mission or on main campus expectations? To what extent are branch faculty tied to their main campus departments? Do they serve on committees? Do department chairs take strong interest in branch faculty and their support?

The extent to which the origin frames or anchors how institutional leaders and, especially, main campus faculty and staff perceive the role of branches became apparent to me. How should campuses be funded, and what new programs or services should be “allowed”? One implication for me was that I often recognized opportunities that seemed obvious, yet they were anything but obvious for people at the client institution. Tempting as it might be to claim special skills on my part, I think it was more a matter of fresh eyes, coming from outside, that were not embedded in the local frame and that had seen varied responses to similar challenges.

Of course, it is well known that anchoring is a major issue, whenever organizations explore new directions. Branch campuses are no different, and somehow breaking loose from anchors or stale frames is essential. Without fresh eyes looking at past practices, I doubt that much innovation will occur, but those fresh eyes will be of little value unless institutional leaders are prepared to challenge entrenched attitudes and assumptions.

INFLUENTIAL CHAMPIONS ARE REQUIRED

Without exception, my visits to branch campuses occurred, at least in part, because some people in leadership roles believed their campuses need to grow. Generally, this desire for growth came partly from a sincere interest in serving place-bound students, but also from a perceived need to generate new revenue from outreach programs (primarily branch campuses and online programs). Usually, the president had specifically stated that branch campuses should grow, but always there were main campus barriers to making it happen. (More on that later.)

I simply do not believe that branch campuses are likely to expand programs and increase enrollment unless the president (or, in some circumstances, the provost) is a vocal supporter. I have seen situations where presidents did speak up, but provosts refused to bring the operational leadership to make it happen. In those cases, the provost’s words suggested support, but he or she was unwilling to invest time or money to drive progress. It was a passive-aggressive response. I have seen other situations where the president was an essentially passive leader, and it actually was the provost who led the charge for growth, with the president’s approval.

The problem for branches is that presidents and provosts generally do not have time to make branches a top, consistent priority, given so many other demands from stakeholders. Thus, my conclusion is that presidential or provost commitment is a necessary, but often not a sufficient element for growth. Someone else needs to be the one who can call a meeting or make a phone call to clear the way when the inevitable opposition emerges. Champions are critical, and they can’t come from the branches, themselves. I have seen effective champions who had specific branch campus oversight, but I also have seen effective champions who carried titles such as vice president for administration, vice president of student affairs, or vice provost.

A REVENUE-SHARING PLAN CAN SOLVE A LOT OF PROBLEMS

Most institutions face significant financial challenges, and although that may encourage presidents and boards to seek growth from new audiences, very often a major stumbling block is the lack of financial investment in branch campuses. Bluntly, there is no real strategy to identify new programs, to target marketing and recruitment, or to provide services specific to the needs of place bound students. Importantly, many branch budgets are inadequate to support current enrollment, let alone growth, and there is little or no connection between credit hours taught and revenue committed.

One can make a passionate argument that branches should keep more of the revenue they generate, or that the broader institution should increase branch funding to support new initiatives,

but in all likelihood, administrators at the main campus already feel underfunded, themselves. Chairs, deans and administrative department heads probably struggle to meet legitimate needs, and if branches have been serving as cash cows (contributing dollars to support main campus functions), it's going to be a tough sell to decrease their strapped resources so that branches can have more.
This is absolutely a difficult challenge. Nevertheless, I have had some success by suggesting that institutions create a revenue sharing model that is driven by growth. That is, you may have to accept that current revenue is fully committed, and few presidents or chief financial officers are willing to take money, especially from academic units or student support units, to help you grow. On the other hand, new revenue is uncommitted, so it can be shared by those who contribute to growth.

Generally, I recommend that, if branch growth is the goal, most new net revenue (profit, after direct instructional expense) should go to the branches; a second significant piece should go to those academic units that generate credit hours on the branches; and, a smaller piece should go to student support units that are critical to branch campus student success. For example, this might include financial aid, academic advising, or admissions. In my experience, branch campus leaders are confident that they can grow enrollment, if they are allowed access to the right programs and to branch-focused recruitment/marketing, so they are encouraged by a challenge with a promised reward.

The bottom line is this: unless some meaningful commitment is made to allow branch campus revenue to grow, then the institution is not really serious about encouraging enrollment growth. Of course, branch leaders should be accountable for developing and implementing thoughtful plans to use that revenue effectively. They should have a prioritized list for investment, usually tied to recruiting, student services, technology, faculty support, and facilities improvement.

TENSION BETWEEN BRANCH CAMPUSES AND ONLINE PROGRAMS

No doubt, online courses and programs are the shiny new thing in higher education program delivery. I was fortunate enough to lead the team at Ohio University that laid the foundation for online program growth, so I am not inclined to favor branches over online opportunities or vice versa. However, I am convinced that branches and online choices speak to different student audiences, at least at the present time.

My sense is that many institutional leaders do not understand that they can aggressively pursue growth in both "markets." On several visits I discovered that academic units were offered significantly greater incentives to participate in online programs than to support branch courses. I never saw evidence of any intention to hurt branches, but rather the online initiative seemed to have been created *sui generis*, without much thought about existing main campus or branch programs: Unintended consequences often create complications. Once again, I see a lack of real strategic thinking, but I encourage institutions to pursue multiple audiences. It does not have to be either-or, when there are opportunities for growth.

THE ETERNAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PRODUCTION ENGINE AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Once again, when I visit branch campuses, a significant goal is to encourage growth in enrollment. Although many branch campuses may be offering relatively traditional programs and services, there always is some sense of entrepreneurship or innovation that differs from day-to-day life on the main campus. Awareness of local program needs, not to mention critical services for the local audience, are top-of-the-mind for branch leaders, yet those same leaders spend a large portion of their time trying to gain cooperation from reluctant main campus partners.

Borrowing from an excellent book, called *The Other Side of Innovation: Solving the Execution Challenge* (Govindarajan and Trimble, 2010), there always will be conflict between established main campus practices and efforts at innovation, whether on branch campuses, within online programs, or even within some main campus operations. Govindarajan and Trimble refer to the established practices as the "production engine." Always and forever, the production engine values stability, consistency, and predictability, all of which stand in the way of innovation.

I continue to be surprised by how effectively some main campus leaders block the intentions of presidents, provosts, or other champions. I suppose it is to be expected that a dean or academic department chair might have priorities that conflict with outreach (e.g., program accreditation requirements or recent main campus enrollment growth), and my advice generally is to work with those who are open, and then to make sure that you have a revenue sharing model that makes their support visible and financially worthwhile.

A bigger surprise, to me, is the effective resistance that comes from such areas as admissions, financial aid, communications/marketing, or even the registrar. The ability of support offices to create a bottleneck would be impressive, if it weren't so problematic. This is where a champion becomes most significant. If branch enrollment is a priority, someone needs to be able to talk to those who are dragging their feet and help them understand what is needed (i.e., as a friend of mine says, someone needs to "pray over them"). If there are legitimate challenges, such as adding significant work to an already-understaffed financial aid office, then perhaps that office should be included in the revenue sharing model or otherwise financially recognized for their contribution.

It has never made sense to me that support offices should have the power to block new ideas, but I do recognize that many institutions have underfunded important functions, just as they have underfunded branches. In today's highly competitive environment, prospective students have options, and place bound students can and do walk away if they feel unappreciated.

GETTING AGGRESSIVE WITH THE PRODUCTION ENGINE

When faced with conflict, nearly all of us prefer collaborative solutions, or at least a shot at compromise. Sometimes, however, we need to compete aggressively to get our way. Because branch campuses typically lack the clout that, say, academic departments hold, the better part of wisdom may be to emphasize negotiation and a friendly smile. Nevertheless, in two areas I believe so strongly that interference from the production engine is wrong and hurtful to students that branch leaders and their champions should demand that their needs be met.

The first area is development of the branch campus class schedule. Nothing has stunned me more than the examples I have seen of branch courses being scheduled by main campus department chairs. I can tell story after story of unneeded courses being put on the schedule, perhaps because some main campus faculty member wants to make extra money, or even because a department chair wants to get a lousy teacher away from main campus students.

Moreover, I have seen courses added or cancelled from the main campus, without the branch campus staff even knowing about it. I visited a branch that marketed a complete baccalaureate in business, yet a required course had never been offered, because it was taught by a single main campus professor who refused to be bothered to serve branch students. Over and over again, I have seen a lack of predictability in course offerings, making it nearly impossible for students to plan ahead. Too often, I have seen courses offered only in the daytime, when student demand for the program came from people who worked during the day and attended classes at night.

Honestly, I do not know how to express calmly just how absurd this is. If this is happening at your campus, it must stop, or you must recognize that your competition is going to take your students. Bad experiences will spread around your community like wildfire. This one makes me so angry that I have considered calling an institution's competitors to tip them off to the opportunity. (I have never actually done that.) Serve your students and your community or give it up.

The second area is equally absurd. At far too many institutions marketing communications and recruitment are controlled from the main campus. I could get into a lengthy discussion of why this happens, but bottom line, the main campus admissions and marketing offices are afraid the branch campus will somehow do something that hurts the main campus. So here is a Marketing 101 lesson: Successful marketing requires deep knowledge of your audience. Recruiting students for branch campuses is different than recruiting for traditional main campus students, and although there may be exceptions, I have yet to see a main campus admission (or marketing) office that knew as much about the branch audience as the branch staff knew.

I do offer one caveat: Branch staff generally are not experts in marketing. (They do tend to be quite knowledgeable about recruiting.) The institution has an interest in assuring that messages, and even editorial standards, are consistent, so there is nothing wrong with collaborating in these areas. However, branch campus leadership should drive the marketing and recruitment efforts tied to their campuses.

ADVICE TO BRANCH CAMPUS LEADERS

Finally, I offer a few thoughts to branch campus leaders. Perhaps it is because leaders cared enough to invite me in, but the dedication of leaders to the outreach mission of branch campuses never fails to impress me. Somehow things get done and progress is made here and there.

The problem is that, if significant growth is the goal, new, creative approaches are required. It is well known that adult learners have three main priorities: They care about the program they want, offered at an affordable price, and delivered flexibly. Leaders should get up every day thinking about how they can do better in these areas.

In my experience, many branches rely on interactive television and face-to-face delivery for most courses, and those definitely are important options. However, I encourage branches to make greater use of blended delivery, in order to enhance flexibility and to offer a clear option to fully online courses.

Growth likely will require new programs, and those programs typically should target well-defined audiences. For example, getting word to interested teachers about a new master's degree program should be straightforward. Selected baccalaureate completion programs might require a broader marketing approach, but the messaging should be focused and clear. Lockstep or cohort programs often lend themselves to the efficient scheduling of courses, and relevant support services should be apparent.

Growth also requires understanding local trends. What can you do better than your competitors? Are you less expensive? Are classes offered at times or in formats that work well for the audience? Can you create a program that is unique to your campus, but hits directly at a problem in your community? What is happening in local schools that might lead to partnerships?

I favor developing a diverse basket of certificate and degree programs, but then working with each to develop targeted marketing strategies. Some opportunities may work best during the day or the evening. Some may work well in an accelerated format; some may require that you create attractive internships or clinical experiences; some may target a local industry. Treat each opportunity thoughtfully and on its own terms.

I preach over and over that branch leaders must immerse themselves in their enrollment and budget data, as well as making sure that services are easily accessed by busy people. They must build strong community relationships and become well known on the main campus. It still is the case that relationships are more important to success than anything else. Leading branch campuses is challenging, but the access and outreach mission is vital and energizing for the right people.

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An Accreditation and Assessment Survey of Branch Campuses

Faimous Harrison, Ph.D.
Dean
California State University, Stanislaus, Stockton Center, fharrison@csustan.edu

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An Accreditation and Assessment of Branch Campuses Survey

ABSTRACT

The National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) is the premier multi-campus higher education organization whose focus is on offsite locations in the United States and abroad. In 2018, NABCA's Research Committee conducted an accreditation and assessment postsecondary education survey that was administered to universities and community colleges throughout the United States. The intent of the survey was to better understand the quality assurance measures, accreditation processes, and reporting practices associated with branch campuses.

Key Words: academic rigors, accreditation, assessment, branch campus, national association of branch campus administrators, offsite location, quality assurance, student success

INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) is the premier multi-campus higher education organizations in the United States and abroad. As documented on the website, "the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) is a professional organization committed to supporting the mission and goals of higher education professionals who work at a location that is separate from the parent campus". The "parent" or "main" campus of a postsecondary education institution is where the executive leadership, governance structure, and at times funding for the "child" or "branch" campus. The parent campus is the originating or sponsoring campus of the branch campus.

Despite the abundant amount of research associated with assessment, student success, quality assurance, scholarship, academic rigors, student persistence, graduation rates on postsecondary learning campuses, there is a large void when it comes to remote or offsite branch and multi-campus institutions (Dengerink, 2009; Fonseca & Bird, 2007; & Mindrup, 2012). The National Association Postsecondary Education Cooperative report titled "The History and Origins of Survey Items for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" acknowledged that there is no consistent data on branch campuses being reported to the organization (2012). Recognizing that reporting data separately for each campus location that offers a complete degree is not a requirement, the NCES Handbook of Survey Methods suggest that "branch campuses are asked to report as individual units" (n.d.).

BACKGROUND

The term "branch campus" represents a site which offers complete programs, has its own faculty, and has its own administrative and budgetary structure. Whereas the term "Additional Location" was used to define locations offering at least 50% of the courses in a program, and, "other instructional site" identified higher education learning sites that where less than 50% of a complete program for any program offered. The purpose of the NABCA accreditation and assessment survey was to better understand the processes and practices that were in place for quality assurance in the academy, and to advance research for offsite higher education facilities.

For the purpose of the survey, "Branch Campus" was an umbrella term, and includes any branch, center, satellite, extension, regional, twig, or other terminology used to describe a physical higher education location that is sponsored and away from the parent campus. The students are provided an opportunity to take classes to earn a certificate, associate, bachelor, post-baccalaureate credential, or graduate degree. The intent of the survey is to better understand if branch campuses are accredited separately and the quality assurance processes that are in place. The results of the survey advances research and promotes best practices for branch and multi-campus learning institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The design approach employed was an applied, descriptive and quantitative questionnaire survey. The approach was chosen for its usefulness in the academy to advance research, practicality for establishing and influencing policy, and for determining best practices for constituents that have a vested interest in branch or multi-campus institutions. The options for responses were limited, controlled, and standardized, and not open-ended questions, which called upon a quantitative lens and design (Creswell, 2005; Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). The foci of the study were exploratory and not determining causation from the themes that may emerge from the data. There is minimal accreditation and assessment research for branch campuses and multi-campus institutions. Therefore, it is premature to determine a clearly defined problem without this data which is the rationale for this exploratory study. The respondents represented four-year public and private universities, and community and technical colleges. The survey was administered during the 2017-18 academic year. An electronic questionnaire was administered, and the dataset response options were student, faculty, administrator/staff, community member, and other.

There were several plausible approaches to this study. With the understanding that there is little, if any clearly defined standardized accreditation and assessment practices and standards for branch and multi-campus institutions, a survey design was chosen as the foundation. A survey design provides the opportunity to test a small sample of a population to determine if themes, trends, or identifiable practices can be extrapolated that are generalizable to a larger group. The instrument was administered electronically which provided the maximum flexibility

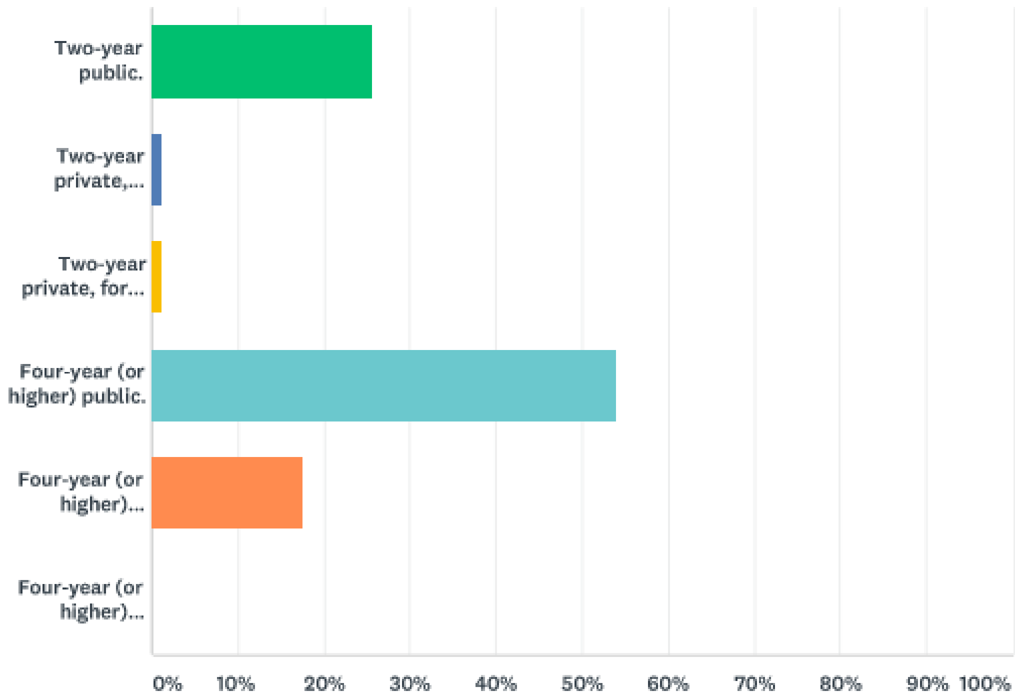
DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND TOOLS

An electronic questionnaire administered by the NABCA were used for the survey. The survey was structured with prepared questions and response choices. The aim was to better understand the accreditation processes, and reporting practices associated with branch and multi-campus institutions. An advantage of the electronic questionnaire was the convenience and flexibility for the participants. Whereas a potential drawback was that the survey instrument assumed that respondents had a basic foundational knowledge and understanding of accreditation and assessment processes, practices, and standards utilized in postsecondary learning institutions.

RESULTS

There were seventy-four respondents of NABCA's 2018 accreditation and assessment of branch campuses survey. The N = 74 represented administrators, faculty, and other respondents, with 93%, 69 out of the 74 respondents identifying as an administrator or staff. According to the respondents, 62% (n = 46) represented branch campuses, 30% (n = 22) represented additional locations, and 8% (n = 6) represented other instructional sites. The majority of the parent institutions were four-year or higher colleges or universities compared to two-year colleges. The respondents included public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions. Figure 1 demonstrates the percentages of each.

Figure 1.
Parent Institution Site.



The distance from the parent campus varied significantly. As a result, NABCA grouped the campuses accordingly. The largest group percentages were 42% (n = 31) and included sites that were 21-50 miles away from the main or parent campus. Representation from the second largest group accounted for 30% (n = 22) and included offsite locations that were 51-100 miles away. The third largest group accounted for 14% (n = 10) and included distances between 10-20 miles, and the fourth group represented 7% (n = 5) and included locations that were 101-200 miles from the main or parent campus. The fifth largest group was 5% (n = 4) and represented sites that were 200 miles or greater, and the smallest group was 3% (n =2) and included campuses within 10 miles from the parent or main campus.

For the purpose of this survey, NABCA's research committee believed the fall semester FTE (full-time equivalent) and unduplicated headcount (enrollment) at the offsite locations would be worthwhile information to secure. The unduplicated headcount (HC) at most postsecondary learning institutions is greater than FTE when representing students. The majority of the FTE and HC data represented locations that had between 50 and less than 2,500 students. However, the unduplicated HC for sites that had 5,000 or more students was greater than sites that had less than 50, and locations that had a total between 2,500-4,999. Figures 2 and 3 shows the percentages of FTE and HC based on the Fall Semester or Quarter of the 2017-18 academic year.

Figure 2.
Most recent fall semester FTE.

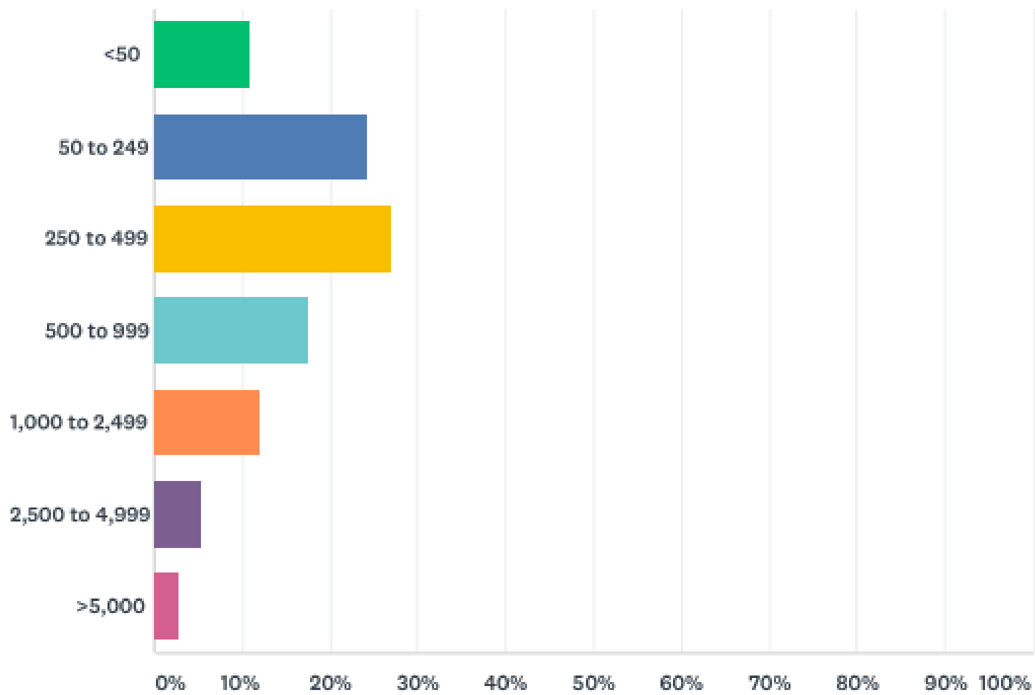
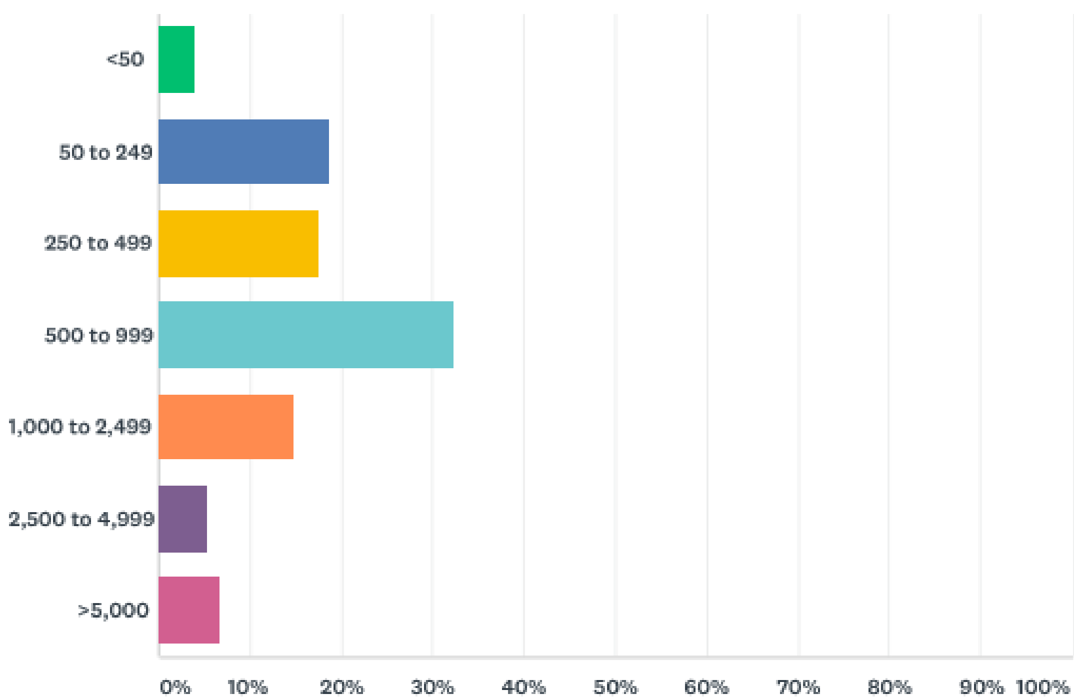


Figure 3.
Most recent fall semester unduplicated headcount.



The majority of the respondents (99%) reported that that their branch campus offered undergraduate programs. Graduate programs were offered at 58%, and non-credit or workforce development opportunities were available from 49% of the branch campus institutions.
A surprising finding was that only 55% of the 60 respondents reported their branch campus conducted unit reviews or self-assessment reviews. While taking in consideration that 8% of the respondents were not sure, 37% reported that unit or self-assessment reviews were not administered at the branch campuses.

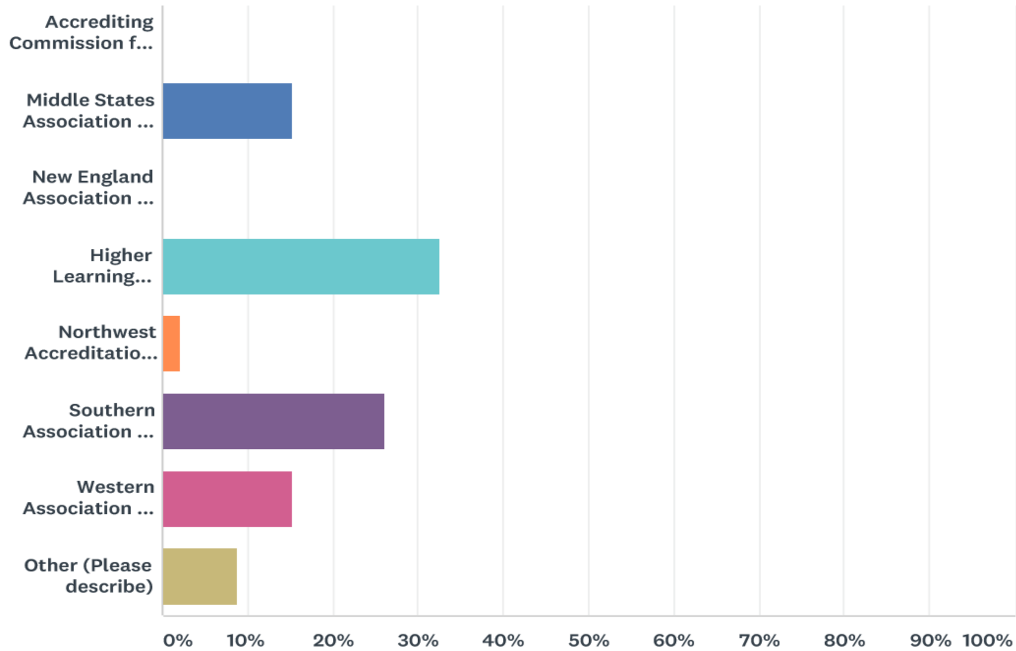
From the institutions that did provide unit and assessment reviews, 49% conducted them annually, 23% every 2-3 years, 20% every 3-5 years, 3% every 6-7 years, and 9% either 8 or more years. Furthermore, 25% of the institutions contracted with an external consultant to conduct the unit or self-assessment review of the documents, and to conduct a site visit at the branch campus. The external consultant reviews and visit occurred less frequently, with only 56% occurring every 2-3 years, 22% every 4-5 years, and 22% administered once every 8 or more years.

More than two-thirds of the respondents (68%) acknowledged that there was a separate reporting requirement, or an on-campus visit conducted by the appropriate regional accrediting agency for the branch campus site visit during the accreditation or reaffirmation process. The accrediting agency choice options were:

1. Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJSC-WASC)
2. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA)
3. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
4. Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
5. Northwest Accreditation Commission (NAC)
6. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)
7. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)
8. Other (Please describe)

Figure 4 provides a snapshot of the 46 responses.

Figure 4.
Regionally accredited agency.



To a lesser degree, some of the respondents reported they were nationally accredited. The more frequent external program specific accreditation agencies that were offered, included teacher education (CAEP, NCATE, TEAC, ACSI, ACTS, TESOL, SPAC, or other) 50%, nursing (COA, CCNE, ACEN, NLNAC, ACCN, CNEA, or other) 47%, business (ACSB, AACSB, or other) 43%, social work (CSWE or other) 35%, and engineer (ABET, EAC, ETAC, other) 13%. Almost 30% of the respondents reported having an academic discipline specific accreditation agency that was not listed from the options provided, and 22% of the respondents reported that none of the academic discipline specific programs had separate accreditation standards.

The chief "on-site" officer or person in charge position and titled varied at each branch campus. Presidents or chancellors represented 5%, vice presidents, vice chancellors, or deans represented 28%, directors, managers, or coordinators represented 60%, and other non-specific titles represented 7% based on the 60 respondents to this question. Only 28% of the chief officers for the branch campus were a member of the institutions senior accrediting team and participated at most, if not all, of the scheduled assessment meetings and events. Furthermore, only 28% of the respondents strongly agreed that the role and purpose of the branch campus were clearly defined and aligns with the mission, vision, values, character, and objectives of the parent campus; and is visible to the public in print and on public websites.

The majority of the respondents reported there was a systematic and annual review to assess the quality of the academic rigors, educational expected learning outcomes and standards of performance at the branch campus. However, the degree of confidence varied, with only 23% reporting that they strongly agreed with this was process taking place at the branch campus that they were associated with. The majority of the respondents (58%) either mildly agreed, mildly disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that a systematic and annual review were being conducted for the branch campus.

Academic freedom and resources to support faculty, staff, and students is an essential component of the academy. The majority of the 60 respondents (80%) either strongly agreed, agreed, or mildly agreed that the resources offered at the branch campus were readily available and comparable to what is offered at the parent campus. Also, based on the same response options, regardless of the modes of delivery, 90% of the respondents reported that the number of faculty with advanced credentials and industry experience to ensure high standards of performances and scholarship was adequate for the curriculum offered and certificate, credential, or degree that were offered at the respective branch campus.

The study solicited additional responses to questions that were associated with accreditation and assessment of branch campuses. Figure 5. provides highlights to the remainder of the questions and the response percentages.

Figure 5.
Additional accreditation and assessment responses.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mildly Agree	Mildly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
There are ample opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to give feedback and recommendations regarding the branch campus to on-site leaders, including anonymously.	33%	32%	27%	3%	3%	2%	0%
There are ample of opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to give feedback and recommendations (including anonymously) regarding the branch campus through their	28%	25%	25%	7%	13%	2%	0%

parent campus.							
There are opportunities for scholarship, and creative curricular and co-curricular activities for students, faculty and staff at the branch campus that are scalable in comparison to the parent campus.	15%	23%	22%	13%	15%	10%	2%
Teaching, learning, scholarship, assessment, professional development, and service is recognized, promoted, supported and provided by the parent campus at the branch campus.	13%	35%	33%	10%	5%	3%	0%

The results demonstrated that the majority of the respondents (65%) either strongly agreed or agreed that there were ample opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to give feedback and recommendations regarding the branch campus to either on-site leaders, anonymously, and 53% of the respondents were able to accomplish these options on the parent campus.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of the survey data was that 60% of the 60 respondents either only mildly agreed, mildly disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that there were opportunities for scholarship, and creative curricular and co-curricular activities for students, faculty and staff at the branch campus that were scalable to the parent campus. Furthermore, 62% did not strongly agree or agree that teaching, learning, scholarship, assessment, professional development, and service was recognized, promoted, supported, and provided by the parent campus at the branch campus.

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations associated with this study. First, the majority of the responses were from administrators, and the response rate from other categories were low. At most, if not all higher education institutions around the country, faculty play a large part in the accreditation and assessment processes and standards. A small percentage of the participants self-identified as a faculty member or another affiliation associated with a branch campus. Second, the responses represented the following categorical variables and groups: (a) two-year public; two-year private, nonprofit; (b) two-year private, for profit; (c) four-year (or higher) public; (d) four-year (or higher) private, nonprofit; (e) four-year (or higher) private, or for profit institutions. The number of respondents in some of the categories were small and may not be generalizable for other postsecondary institutions. Third, the sample size was small and did not include administrators, faculty, staff, students, or other representatives from all 50 states. As a result, other institutions and states may employ accreditation and assessment standards that may have the potential to significantly influenced the results. Lastly, the survey was open for a short period of time, shortly after new year's, which may have contributed to the limited responses, percentages and distributions of the types of institutions, and the participates affiliation with a branch a campus.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The number of responses were a small percentage of the total number of community and technical colleges, and four-year colleges and universities. A future study should target each one of the institution categories separately and encapsulate a comparative analysis lens that includes both representatives from the parent campus, and representatives from the branch campus. For each of the categorical and affiliation variables, the study should assess the similarities and differences among the groups. Another recommendation would be to employ a mixed-methods study by adding a qualitative lens with interviews or focus groups representing members from the different subgroups. The variables would represent the parent campus, branch campus, respondent's affiliation, and type of institution. Further, it is recommended to examine student success outcomes for the institutions that employ and perform regular accreditation and assessment processes and compare them with those that do not. A recommendation would be to include the demographic variables of the respondents, and the number of years each participant was associated with the institution. Final recommendation includes extrapolating the responses specifically by the individual's affiliation, which may demonstrate if there are similarities and differences that can be established by group.

CONCLUSION

As previously documented, "the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) is a professional organization committed to supporting the mission and goals of higher education professionals who work at a location that is separate from the parent campus". Regardless if an individual is associated with a community or technical college, four-year college or university, teaching and learning are key components of most postsecondary learning institutions. There are assessment data practices and processes that encapsulates curriculum and instruction modalities, institution type, and size. Accreditation and assessment of all campuses are essential for transparency for internal and external stakeholders, performance assessment, and quality assurance. However, there is minimal available research, standards, and best practices that specifically examines branch and multi-campus institutions. Furthermore, that takes in consideration a variety of lenses, including from the different groups that represent the parent campus.

The majority of the branch campuses that were represented in the study did conduct unit or self-assessment reviews (55%), however, the frequency of the reviews and how they were administered differed drastically. From the institutions that did perform a unit or self-assessment review, only 25% reported contracting with an external consultant to review documents or to perform a site visit at the branch campus. Furthermore, 68% of the respondents reported that there was a separate reporting requirement or on-campus site facilitated by the institutions accrediting agencies for the branch campus.

The majority of the participants (93%) identified themselves as an administrator or staff, which included presidents or chancellors, vice presidents, vice chancellors, dean, directors, managers, or coordinators. Less than one-third of the respondents (28%) reported that the chief officer for the branch campus was a member of the institutions senior accrediting team, and participates at most, if not all thee scheduled meetings and events. With 75% of the respondents reporting they “strongly agree” or “agree” that the role and purpose of the branch campus was clearly defined and aligned with the mission, vision, values, characteristics, and objectives of the parent campus, and were visible to the public in print and on public websites for the majority institutions, other responses did not fare as well. For example, only 41% of the participants reported that the institution conducted a systematic and annual review to assess the quality of the academic rigors, educational expected learning outcomes and standards of performance at the branch campus. Based on the inconsistency of the responses, and the low percentages of the “strongly agree” or “agree” responses for some of the other questions that were asked during the study, one is led to believe that additional resources and time is needed to assess branch campuses at many institutions. Furthermore, to better understand outcomes and performance, additional research is needed to add to the body of knowledge around accreditation and assessment of branch campuses.

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Inclusion and Diversity: What it Really Means!

joyce gillie gossom
Executive Director
National Association of Branch Campus Administrators, nabca@nabca.net

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Inclusion and Diversity: What it Really Means!

ABSTRACT

A lot of people talk about diversity… sometimes they talk about inclusion. For me, leaders must practice inclusion *and* diversity in order to be effective. Putting yourself in the other person's shoes. That's more than just having a program or launching an initiative. Inclusion and diversity is about how you see, value, and interact with your followers and the other people around you. In fact, I feel so strongly about it that I devoted a chapter to it in my book, *Why Are They Following Me?"* it's called, "Put Yourself in My Shoes."

Both Steven Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and Karen Salmansohn, *The Bounce Back Book* author, have written about a critical element of leadership. Covey calls it, “Seek First to Understand,” while Salmansohn calls it, “Think Like a Lion.” Both convey the same principle that my Cherokee grandmother taught me, “Put yourself in their shoes.”

Before you can lead, you must know who your followers are.

So simple. So rational. So practical. So hard!

I’ve watched and coached hundreds of leaders. I’ve only followed a few. The ones I followed understood me. They took the time to know who I am, how I think, what I would and would not do.

The ones I followed knew, when they were told about something I had done, whether or not it was truth or exaggeration. They never bothered to even ask me about things they knew weren’t true. They knew when a certain project came along, whether or not I was the best person to do it – regardless of my title or position in the organization. They also knew and recognized when I got restless or bored and needed to be stretched. The very small handful of individuals I willingly followed, learned to walk in my shoes, knew how I thought, and understood me. They didn’t expect me to act like or be like everyone else. Or act like them. They also didn’t expect anyone else to act like or be like me. I was chosen because I brought different abilities, culture, talents, needs, and skills to the table. All of their followers knew that they were valuable and valued. I would have followed them anywhere. And I did.

When I’m dealing with a challenge, I don’t want to only be surrounded by people who can do what I can already do; I want to be surrounded by people who can do what I can’t. I want to know someone will be able to pick out what I miss or overlook. I want to be able to call forward that person who has a linear thought process when we need to come up with a linear sequence of activities from the ideas we have brainstormed. That’s one of my weaknesses. Why on earth would I want to be surrounded by people who have a spatial thought process like I do? (Think of a spider web… that’s how my brain works… and everything is connected!)

You can tell so much about the most senior-level person in an organization by looking at his key hires. Especially the people who report directly to him. If they all look, sound, think, see, and act like him… it won’t be long before the organization gets blindsided or finds itself at a dead end. That’s the first thing I look at when I’m asked to work with a person as coach or with the organization as consultant. It’s amazing that it’s usually the last thing most people consider – if they even do. Is it uncomfortable to have people with different ideas, ways of doing and being? You bet it is!! That’s why I need them (laughing). They keep me sharp and focused. They show me what I’ve overlooked.

In my last higher education administrator position, I had multiple opportunities to put the “shoes” principle to work. Working as the Associate Dean of multiple remote locations provided an almost perfect setting for me to take the time getting to know the faculty, staff, and students, as well as members in each community. When I initially arrived, one of the first things we did was schedule one-on-one meetings with every staff and faculty member. We used the time getting to know each other and I'd ask questions about his or her position and responsibilities. I wanted to know what they enjoyed and didn't enjoy about the position because it gave me insight into preferences, strengths, areas for improvement, position fit and institutional fit. We also scheduled time for me to talk with the Associate Provost and Provost to find out what they wanted to accomplish at the locations, whether our goal was to grow and where/how. Having that information let me create an organizational chart that emphasized abilities, culture, talents, needs, and skills. Right away, some things were glaringly apparent.

Whether by design or default, the majority of staff members were female and detail-oriented, rather than spatial or global, not of color, from the south, and had gone to school at the institution. The majority of the faculty members were male, not of color, intra- rather than interpersonal, and spatial or global oriented. In other words, each personnel group was more than capable of going over their respective cliffs because they thought, saw, and overlooked pretty much the same things! My work was cut out for me. Spending a few more months observing and interacting by getting to know the faculty and staff helped me know which ones needed to move on to other academic or non-academic organizations and which ones were in the wrong position but at the right organization. We had those conversations. What I discovered every single time was relief on the part of the person who was not in the "right fit" position. She would look at me with such hopefulness that I was amazed no one had ever taken the time to discover what was glaringly obvious. He would ask if I could help him locate a position within another sector with relief and anticipation.

Putting yourself in the shoes of the faculty, staff, and students you interact with on a regular basis – whether you have one location or several – pays off in the short term and long term. As we filled positions, I gave human resources instruction about the pool they could provide so that we began to have a more diverse pool of candidates for every position. Unless the pool for staff included males, non-former students, people of color and language differences, big picture and linear/detailed thinkers, and also included people from areas other than local, they couldn't close the pool. We also provided lists of professional associations where HR could post the job listing that they had never used, which also broadened our scope.

For every position, we set up a committee to do the initial screening and interviews. I didn't interact with applicants until the committee worked down to their top two or three candidates. I'd meet with the search committee and give them the parameters of what we needed in terms of personality, thinking, abilities, and more. They would conduct application screening, meet with me to discuss and recommend who should go forward; then they would conduct phone interviews with those selected, meet again with me; finally, they would bring candidates to campus and conduct interviews and provide tours. The on-site interviews included a set of situational cases each candidate was asked to respond to while on site. The cases were designed by each search committee and reflected the kinds of scenarios that would be encountered on the job. Finally, the committee would meet with me again and provide their top two or three and the rationale. I'd make the final decision, usually taking their recommendations, and have a lunch interview with each finalist before meeting with the committee to make my final decision with them. The beauty was, and still is, that my faculty and staff "knew me" just as I "knew" them, so they were very aware of the holes we had in terms of talent and perspective, so they were great at identifying the intangibles that often don't show up on paper. The process forced us to look for people who brought skills and abilities we didn't have yet because the members of the search committee were different and included faculty as well as all levels of staff members and students. It's a process I've used for decades and only once has it failed me!

Finally, the other way I made sure to "walk in their shoes" and be inclusive was through my daily and monthly interactions with our faculty and staff. I had one-on-one monthly meetings with my direct reports, kept a folder for every staff and faculty member with notes on things they shared about family, hobbies, travel, and other interests. That was helpful when I wanted to recognize someone for going above and beyond… I always knew what he or she liked and I knew who would want public recognition and who didn't. We had weekly team meetings with all of my direct reports and changed the location of our meetings so that they got to see each other in their workspaces. We scheduled visits for me at each of the centers and campuses so that each month I spent a day at the non-military locations interacting with the students, faculty, and staff. Everyone knew I was coming, and I always brought some kind of treat with me! We had quarterly staff and faculty combined meetings to provide updates, share frustrations, or issues and spend time with each other. We also planned lunches and other events for all of the staff and faculty as well as events for our students and members of the community. I asked people to do special projects based on what they brought to the table, not based on their position or title.

These and so many other things enabled us to effectively encourage, correct, and motivate the faculty and staff members and get to know our students and community. As a result, we completely diversified our faculty and staff, and our student population. We grew from three to seven locations and from 800 to 1900 students. Most important, everyone felt included and relevant to the strategic goals. It's not enough to just "diversify"; you have to then invite people to sit at the table in order to really be inclusive. You have to know what they like and don't like, what they can and can't do, what are their strengths and what areas need attention… then work with and incorporate that into your leadership. When you do this successfully, people will follow out of commitment, not just compliance. And that's the best kind of following of all, to me! People who are committed will go the distance, reach the goal, then work with you to set new heights to reach.