



Philippine Institute for Development Studies  
*Surian sa mga Pag-aaral Pangkaunlaran ng Pilipinas*

## A Review of the Accreditation System for Philippine Higher Education Institutions

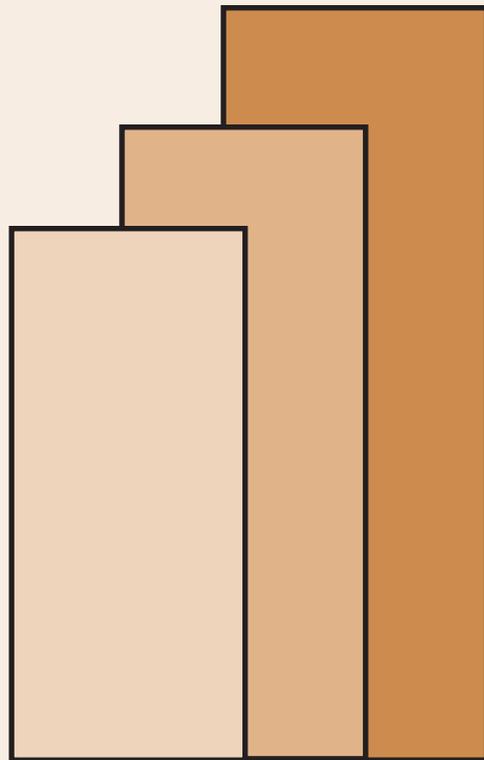
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# **A Review of the Accreditation System for Philippine Higher Education Institutions**

Mitzie Irene P. Conchada and Marites M. Tiongco<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

For any developing country, improving the quality of higher education institutions is of paramount interest of government agencies especially the Commission on Higher Education. Several reforms have taken place and Paqueo et al. (2012) points out that one of the initiatives being done is rationalizing the structure of public higher education and improving the budget to ensure resource mobilization and cost efficiency. Despite these efforts, there are several issues that need to be addressed and one is the voluntary nature of the accreditation system. Another related issue to this is the number of multiple agencies catering to the accreditation of the various higher education institutions. This paper reviewed the existing accreditation processes and roles of accrediting bodies to present a clearer perspective on the current situation of higher education institutions. Similar to other countries in the region, the accreditation process in the country is initiated by the private sector and is also voluntary which adheres to the nature of the academe. Though it is a way of fostering academic freedom and motivating some institutions to compete, this could result in complacency in others. Policy implications include reshaping the institution in terms of keeping an accreditation mechanism built into the system such as a quality assurance framework.

Keywords: accreditation system, higher education institutions, quality assurance

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a vital role in preparing a country to be globally competitive through the skilled human capital resources it produces. The task is daunting as the institution has to constantly check itself against the standards in place and keep itself abreast of the latest demands of the labor market. This involves investing in a considerable amount of resources to develop its faculty, research, and facilities. A slightly different story may be observed in the case of the Philippines as the quality of several higher education institutions has deteriorated over time – as manifested in the quality of their graduates, among others. Paqueo, Orbeta and Albert (2012) point out that most of the higher education institutions are of low quality as evidenced in low passing rate in the board exams and have few accredited programs.

Raising the quality of higher education institutions is thus one of the motivations on why government agencies such as the Commission on Higher Education are constantly finding ways to address the issue. Reforms are being set in place such as rationalizing the structure of public higher education and improving higher education budget to ensure resource mobilization and cost effectiveness (Paqueo et al., 2012). However, these reforms will not be enough if HEIs themselves are not pressured to constantly improve and set standards above the minimum requirement.

Accreditation is one way that HEIs keep themselves in check with the standards. With the growing number of HEIs in the country and the demand for skilled workers in the global market, there is an urgent need to further enhance quality of education. Corpuz (2003) emphasized the inverse relationship existing between the number of HEIs in the Philippines, which were described as “educational opportunities”, and the level of quality of the educational system in the country. The quality of education is also affected by the competition between private and state universities, the influx of private low-cost, low-quality, and the absence of a centralized accrediting agency.

There are several issues, however, in accreditation. For one, the voluntary nature of accreditation among HEIs only puts pressure on those who are willing and able to undergo the process. Moreover, there is an inquiry on the multiple number of accrediting agencies catering to the various HEIs.

Given this, the study seeks to review existing accreditation process in the Philippines including the specific roles and of the various accrediting agencies. Moreover, the study aims to achieve the following:

- a. Describe the prevailing accreditation system for Higher Education Institutions
- b. Using Philippine experience and drawing from experiences of other countries, identify the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation systems for HEIs
- c. Identify possible criteria for accrediting HEIs programs for promoting high quality as well as indicators for measuring progress of its effects to the enrollment of StuFAP beneficiaries
- d. Formulate possible agenda reforms in the accreditation system of HEIs

There is a need to revisit the responsibilities of the accreditation agencies in the Philippines in order to improve the quality of education among HEIs. Yap (2012) stressed that the low quality of HEIs in the country affects the growth of the economy. This also has implications on the employability of Filipinos in other countries. With globalization and the growing demand for skilled workers, it is imperative to improve the quality of education and one way is through establishing a credible accreditation system. In order to do this, a review of the current system is required.

## II. SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

### a. Historical Overview

Institutions of various types and natures are the focus of several different accrediting bodies in the Philippines. In the field of education, where basic, secondary, and HEIs exist, different agencies are also responsible for each. For HEIs alone, several institutions stand to serve the purpose of accrediting HEIs, depending on the nature of the institution, e.g. PAASCU, ACSC-AA. Despite the specificity of the manner in which various accrediting agencies are geared towards particular institutions, only 15 percent have undergone the process (Corpus, 2003). Evidently, there is a need to further look into the system of accreditation, its objectives, and end goals.

Arcelo (2003) traces the beginnings of Philippine HEI quality assurance to 1957, wherein the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, College and Universities (PAASCU) was formed through the efforts of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) which were comprised of Catholic HEIs. Evidently, accreditation was highly focused on non-secular, religious institutions as establishing HEIs became a trend among religious congregations. However, he also mentions that in 1950, the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities (PACU) was established to “service the needs of the non-sectarian higher-education institutions” (Arcelo, 2003). Ordonez (n.d.) cites instances of disagreements between the sectarian and non-sectarian institutions, and how it made it difficult for PAASCU and PACU to reconcile differences and collaborate as a unified body.

Corpus (2003) illustrates that this was no longer the case when the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities – Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA) and the Association of Christian Schools and Colleges – Accrediting Agency (ACSC-AA) were established in 1973 and 1976 respectively. In 1977, PAASCU, PACU-COA, and ACSC-AA were merged under one umbrella agency which was named the Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines (FAAP). Not long after, state universities were given an accreditation agency for themselves through the formation of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP) which was initiated in 1987 and “formally organized” in 1989 (Corpus, 2003). FAAP was joined by AACUP in 1995.

As mandated by the Higher Education Act of 1994, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) was divided into three sectors, one of which was the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). CHED was then given the autonomy to become the supreme organization over and above accrediting agencies (Arcelo, 2003; Corpus, 2003).

### b. Role of the Commission on Higher Education

According to the CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 1 (2005), also known as the Revised Policies and Guidelines on Voluntary Accreditation in Aid of Quality and Excellence in Higher Education, emphasizes the encouragement of “the use of voluntary non-governmental accreditation systems”, which lines out a set of policies in full support of an accrediting agency’s practices towards regulation. Two accrediting bodies were stated in the CMO: FAAP which consists of the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSCU-AAI), PAASCU, and PACU-COA and the National Network of Quality Accrediting

Agencies (NNQAA), which is inclusive of AACCUP and the Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (ALCUCOA). All processes, policies, frameworks, and systems of accreditation created by the abovementioned bodies must be forwarded for approval to CHED.

#### c. Higher Education Institution Criteria and Components

Based on the case study of Ordonez, for the accreditation of universities and colleges, they should be certified by federations or networks (ACSCU-AAI, PAASCU, PACU-COA) and should undergo: (1) a self-study using a survey to assess the organizational or program profile, (2) an on-site review of the accreditors.

There are 4 levels for HEI Accreditation:

*Level I.* After the application for an accreditation, there will be on-site visitors in the institutions seeking accreditation. If the institution receives positive feedback, that institution is granted a Level I. The findings are passed to FAAP and then endorsed to CHED. This level is good for 2 years.

*Level II.* The procedure is similar to Level I and this level of accreditation but it can last for three years.

*Level III.* This level depends on the outstanding performance of graduates in licensure exams in a certain institution, research projects, strong link with other schools and agencies, efficient library, community extension programs, publications and a high class faculty development program.

*Level IV.* This level of accreditation would require strong research and publication projects, and internationally acknowledged teaching and learning methodologies, global linkages, and contribution of social and educational privileges regionally and nationally. HEIs with this level of accreditation can be at par with the level of excellent foreign universities.

There is no reason for colleges and universities to be complacent despite reaching a high level of accreditation because there are instances that the level of accreditation of HEIs may be downgraded. And when that time comes, institutions have to process the application for accreditation again.

#### d. Accreditation Practices

Accreditation of an HEI in the Philippines merits autonomy, while other forms of quality assessment merit funding and subsidy, as opposed to what other countries practice. As aforementioned, accreditation of individual programs and/or institutions is voluntary on the part of the HEIs, albeit being highly encouraged by CHED (Padua, 2003). Each accrediting agency follows slightly different practices from the rest. Ordonez (n.d.) and Arcelo (2003) illustrate the procedure taken by accrediting agencies. Generally, all agencies subscribe to two steps in accreditation, which are (1) self-study by the assigned department for accreditation, typically in the form of a survey

which is tailor-fit to the HEI's framework, and (2) an on-site assessment by representatives from the accrediting agency.

During the on-site assessment, about five (5) representatives of the accrediting agency initially meet with members of the self-study board and officials. Once this has commenced, the representatives are free to go about in any part of the campus, and are given the mandate to inquire any member of the institution, e.g. students, employees, faculty members. They are also free to approach any student to inquire on various areas of accreditation. At the end of the on-site assessment, the representatives will then meet with the HEI's board and notable officials to discuss observations and findings from the assessment. If there exists a "major weakness" in the HEI's system, they are given a maximum of two years to remedy such weakness until they are considered for certification. The same process goes in applying for Levels II-IV (Arcelo, 2003).

#### e. Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines

There are several accrediting agencies in the country catering to the various HEIs. The Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines is the umbrella organization of three accrediting agencies in the Philippines namely the (1) Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, College, and Universities (PAASCU); (2) Philippine Association of College and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA); and (3) Association of Christian Schools, Colleges, and Universities Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSCU-AAI). The table below discusses the scope of accrediting agency, phases of accreditation, and benefits of full accreditation for the PAASCU and PACU-COA. The benefits of both are similar to each other especially in terms of gaining full administrative deregulation which gives the institution liberty over its degree programs.

<p>Philippine Accrediting Association for Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU)</p>	<p>Open to All but availed of by private universities</p>	<p>1.Application letter must be sent to Board of Directors  2.Submission of necessary documents  <i>Note: Various levels noted in accreditation process apply to PAASCU</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full administrative deregulation, provided that reports of promotion of students and lists of graduates are available for review by CHED at all times.</li> <li>• Financial deregulation in terms of setting tuition and other school fees and charges.</li> <li>• Authority to revise the curriculum without CHED approval provided that CHED and Professional Regulation Commission minimum requirements and guidelines, where applicable, are complied with and the revised curriculum is submitted to CHED Regional Offices.</li> <li>• Authority to graduate students from accredited courses or programs of study in the levels accredited without prior approval of the CHED and without need for Special Orders.</li> <li>• Priority in the awards of grants/subsidies or funding assistance from CHED-Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) for scholarships and faculty development, facilities improvement and other development programs.</li> <li>• Right to use on its publications or advertisements the word</li> </ul>
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			<p>“ACCREDITED” pursuant to CHED policies and rules.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited visitation, inspection and/or supervision by CHED supervisory personnel or representatives.</li> <li>• Authority to offer new courses allied to existing Level III courses without need for prior approval, provided that the concerned CHED Regional Office (CHEDRO) is duly informed.</li> <li>• Privilege to apply for authority to offer new graduate programs, open learning/ distance education, extension classes and to participate in the transnational education</li> <li>• Grant of full autonomy for the program for the duration of its Level IV accredited status.</li> <li>• Authority to offer new graduate programs allied to existing Level IV courses, open learning/ distance education and extension classes without need for prior approval by CHED provided that the concerned CHEDRO is duly informed</li> </ul>
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<p>Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA)</p>	<p>Open to All</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.The consultancy visit</li> <li>2.The self-survey activities</li> <li>3.The preminary visit (for Candidate Status)</li> <li>4. The formal visit (for level I Accredited Status)</li> <li>5.The re-accreditation visit (for level II reaccredited status)</li> <li>6.The level III phase (for level III reaccredited status)</li> <li>7.The level IV phase</li> <li>8.Institutional Accreditation phase</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Full administrative deregulation</li> <li>2. Financial deregulation in terms of setting of tuition and other fees and charges</li> <li>3.Authority to revise the curriculum without CHED approval</li> <li>4.Priority in the awards of grant/subsidies or funding assistance from CHED/DepEd</li> <li>5.Authority to offer new courses allied to existing level III courses without need for prior approval</li> <li>6.Privilege to offer new graduate programs</li> <li>7.Privilege to offer open learning/distance education</li> <li>8.Privilege to offer extension classes and transnational education</li> <li>8.Grant of full autonomy for the program for the duration of its Level IV accredited status</li> <li>9.Authority to offer new graduate programs allied to existing Level IV courses, open learning/distance education without need for prior approval by CHED provided that the concerned CHEDRO is duly informed</li> </ol>
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*Source: PAASCU and PACUCOA websites*

#### f. Accreditation Experience of Other Asian Countries

The next section discusses other Asian countries experience in terms of accreditation. In countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, accreditation is organized by the government and services public and private HEIs. On the other hand, accreditation in countries such as Cambodia, South Korea, India and Japan is led by a private institution composed of various administrators of the HEIs. These countries do not require HEIs to be accredited unless they are ready to comply with the requirements.

##### Cambodia

According to the paper of UNESCO (2006), “Higher Education in South East Asia” Cambodia’s accreditation process is similar to the Philippines, they first undergo a self-evaluation, this process shows that the accrediting agencies that their institution is capable of improvement and absorbing changes recommended by accrediting bodies and different studies. The following are the passed regulations that aims for an effective and efficient development and management of HEIs in Cambodia: Royal Decree in Accreditation of higher Education, Sub-decree on University establishment, decision on a required programme of foundation study at all degree-granting HEIs, decision on credit and credit transfer system, draft of new education law and lastly, draft of the establishment of public HEIs as public administrative institutions. The purpose of these mentioned regulations is to address and fulfill the needs of the labor market, as well as to improve the quality of the students of Cambodia to be at level with the international students.

##### Indonesia

According to the paper of UNESCO (2006), the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) in Indonesia is established by the government and serves as a body to formulate and implement the accreditation of academic programs of both private and public institutions. BAN-PT assesses and accredits the study programs in order to achieve certain standards. Also for the ASEAN region, there is an ASEAN University Network (AUN) which promotes for the improvement of the quality of education under the ASEAN region. AUN also enhances and develops the existing standards in HEIs so that ASEAN students can be competitive enough with the international labor market.

##### South Korea

The Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) was founded in 1982 and is the only organization that handles the quality assurance of HEIs in Korea. The council is composed of presidents and representatives from different universities in Korea. The council evaluates the quality of the universities, create reports regarding their status and enforce policies which aim to improve the ratings of the universities.

These are the overall objectives of the KCUE:

1. Encourage excellence in university education – universities should exceed a fixed level of quality education.

2. Increase the efficiency of university administration – there should be an effort to continuously improve the quality of the universities.
3. Improve the accountability of universities – increase the social involvement of universities.
4. Expand university autonomy – minimize the control of government to universities.
5. Stimulate inter-university cooperation – there should be a presence of trust and collaboration in the university.
6. Increase financial support to universities – generate financial support from the government and companies.

Below is the process of accreditation under KCUE:

1. Application for accreditation and selection of institutions - KCUE notifies universities for accreditation.
2. Self-review – the university will then review its current condition and will send a report to KCUE.
3. Peer review and on-site visit – KCUE will send a representative to the university and sends a report to KCUE about the evaluation.
4. Decision on accreditation status and publicizing the results – KCUE determines the accreditation status of the university based on the reports from the university and the evaluator.

For re-accreditation, universities must re-apply for accreditation when the previous application for accreditation expires

## India

India has one of largest arrays of universities and colleges across different countries. As the number of HEIs grew to as far as hundreds for the university-level and thousands for the college-level, creating an efficient and effective system for quality assessment became increasingly difficult (Stella, 2008). Doing so became especially important since the burgeoning of fake universities.

Quality assessment in India is determined in terms of both recognition and accreditation received by HEIs. However, recognition was deemed to be a “one-time process”, such that there is no way of determining whether or not the HEI is able to maintain the quality they were awarded for. Thus, efforts to strengthen the national accreditation process were made in order to maintain, sustain, and improve the quality of education provided for by HEIs in India (IERF, 2009). It is also important to note that all accrediting agencies in India, albeit being independent from any association with the government, can still be commissioned by them to perform certain tasks (Sanyal & Martin, 2006).

### *Accrediting Agencies*

Assessment and accreditation for HEIs in India is at present voluntary, although movement towards mandatory accreditation has been in the works. Several autonomous and non-autonomous

institutions assess and accredit different HEIs and particular courses. However, for purposes of simplicity, we look at the most widely sought-after agency in the country.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), established National Grants Commission (NGC), is recognized as an autonomous, institutional accrediting body for all HEIs. Different sectors and committees within NAAC, along with several other external consultants aid in the assessment of the accrediting process (Prasad & Stella, 2005). NAAC is responsible for: universities and their undergraduate, post-graduate degrees; affiliated, constituent, or autonomous colleges and all their degrees; departments of universities.

#### *The National Assessment and Accreditation Council*

In assessing and accrediting HEIs, NAAC identifies seven criteria, guided by the NAAC core values that candidate institutions must adhere to. Moreover, several key aspects are lined out under each criterion, and such are graded by evaluators with bases depending on which of the three types of institutions is being assessed, i.e. university, autonomous college, affiliated/constituent college. Out of a 1000-point total, the teaching-learning and evaluation criterion weighs the heaviest among the other six.

The key aspects are graded using letter grades, i.e. A, B, C, and D, ranging from Very Good to Unsatisfactory. After the letter grades are summed and weighted, a corresponding GPA is determined. The seven GPAs are then computed to come up with the CGPA, which determines the final assessment outcome. The CGPA corresponds to one of the letter grades A-D, with 4.00 being the highest, i.e. Very Good. An institution does not qualify for accreditation if it is graded with a 1.50 and below. Clearly, accreditation status is only two-fold: accredited or otherwise, and is valid for up to five years. Quality sustenance is ensured by the Internal Quality Assurance Cells or IQACs which must be adhered to in order to be qualified for re-assessment. Re-assessment for both accredited and non-accredited HEIs is permitted after a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years since the last accreditation (National Assessment and Accreditation Council Website).

As mentioned, there are several other accrediting agencies in India, and one of which is the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). The NBA accords accreditation to technical universities, e.g. engineering, particularly to the specific degree programs of each (IERF, 2009). Typically, technical institutions that avail of NBA accreditation avail of NAAC accreditation as well (Patil, 2006).

#### *Effectiveness on Various Outcomes*

With thousands of universities accredited over the past years, NAAC saw various improvements in the accredited institutions. Stella (2008) identifies several of them. First, universities and colleges accredited by NAAC have taken note of positive changes in the way their respective systems govern the institution, most of which are a step ahead of what was required of them in the assessment. Reforms were observed, both in the administration and in the curricula. Second, interrelationships among all stakeholders in the university, e.g. management and faculty,

have been prosperous and fruitful. Third, institutions that religiously adopted the IQACs became self-assured and “confident” in undergoing re-accreditation, guaranteeing that quality is indeed sustained even after accreditation. Fourth, and on a macro level, NAAC was able to convince the majority of the benefits associated with accreditation, including the various local governments which granted certain incentives for institutions that undergo accreditation. Catering to a large number of institutions, it is impossible for NAAC to sculpt the criteria and key aspects according to the characteristic of each individual institution being accredited, hence the need for a relatively general set of criterion. Stella also identifies negative outcomes of the system. First, the generality of such led to the burgeoning of “copy-cats” – institutions that emulate the best practices of those that are highly assessed due to the general guidelines handed out prior to accreditation. Second, institutions tend to stage their show for the assessors, causing discrepancies between assessment and reality. Third, there is no uniform level of support among the states. One state may hastily give incentives, pushing institutions that are systematically unready to apply for accreditation, leading for favorable results.

### Thailand

Quality assurance and accreditation in Thailand is not as well established as it is in India, which caters to a greater number of HEIs. In fact, external means of quality assurance was only established during the late 1990s, and is carried on by the Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), a public organization. However, control, audit, and assessment is differentiated from accreditation, with the latter being under the sole responsibility of the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) (Kanjapanyakom, 2005). Unfortunately, there are no particular point- and level- systems to characterize accreditation in Thailand. However, it is noted that HEIs generally perform well, with ONESQA and OHEC working together to strengthen the current system of external quality assurance without accreditation (OHEC, n.d.).

### Malaysia

The system of voluntary accreditation in Malaysia does not vary greatly from that of Thailand. The Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA), established in 2007, is solely in charge of the quality assurance of both public and private HEIs (Fahmi, 2006). Accreditation by the MQA is done by program, not by institution. Pre-accreditation, or the accreditation of a particular degree program in its initial phase, is being practiced along with full accreditation. Succeeding full accreditation is the submission of an accreditation report, which is highly qualitative and seeks to describe areas for improvement and sustenance. Accreditation can either be with or without conditions. Program accreditation with conditions requires satisfactory fulfillment of such before granting full accreditation free from any conditions. The accreditation is thus granted perpetually, with 2 to 5 years of close monitoring (Code of practice for programme accreditation, n.d.).

At present, the system is transitioning from program accreditation to institutional audit or IA. Abdulla (n.d.) notes that the shift is primarily caused by complications in implementing program

accreditation by a single body. Abdulla also highlights several challenges that potentially face MQA and all the other candidate institutions in transitioning, such as the difficulty in communicating to a now varying set of stakeholders, and as well as cultural adjustments.

## Japan

According to MEXT (2011), associations that perform accreditation should be given permission by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Universities are accredited by an external accreditation organization every seven years to make sure they keep up with the standards. These are the different organizations that can evaluate HEIs in Japan: the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), the National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE), the Japanese Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE), the Japanese Association for College Association (JACA) and the Japan Law Foundation (JLF). But given all these accrediting bodies, there is only one organization, JUAA which can evaluate all kinds of HEIs. The other organizations can only evaluate one type of institution e.g., JLF can only evaluate law schools. Once universities are evaluated by one these organizations, they receive a detailed written assessment (usually published) according to the rating of their university. Through these accrediting organizations, the Japan MEXT aims for the improvement in teaching and research quality of the universities.

Since JUAA is the only accrediting agency that can evaluate all kinds of HEIs in Japan, we looked at their organizational structure and the process of their accreditation. JUAA's board of trustees and auditors are composed of representatives from different universities. The following are the criteria and guidelines for universities to maintain and improve their rating from JUAA (JUAA, 2011):

1. Mission and Goals – the mission and goals of the university should involve the cultivation of human resources and other objectives related to education and research.
2. Educational and Research Structure – the structure should be according to the mission and goals of the university.
3. Faculty members and Faculty Structure – there should be the ideal image of faculty members and approved policies regarding the faculty structure.
4. Educational Program, Instruction and Outcomes – universities should have specific objectives to improve their diploma and curriculum policies.
5. Student Admissions – the admission should adopt proper admission policies to admit students in a fairly manner.
6. Student Services – there should be services available to the students assisting their learning needs, student needs and career path needs.
7. Educational and Research Environment – there should be the presence of an environment conducive for teaching and research activities.
8. Social Cooperation and Social Contribution – universities must have programs connecting to the community.

9. Administration and Financial Affairs – there should be a presence of an effective administration and management.
10. Internal Quality Assurance – universities must check regularly that they comply with their own standards.

Below is the evaluation process under JUAA. First, universities perform a self-evaluation. Second, universities must submit a self-study report. Third, evaluators are sent to the university that is applying for accreditation. Fourth, JUAA drafts the accrediting results and forwards it to the applying university of comments and suggestions. Fifth, by hearing the comments of the applying university, JUAA then drafts the final results of the accreditation which is to be notified by the Ministry of Education, the final results can be accessed by the public. Sixth, the university sends a progress report, this is sent after three years of the accreditation evaluation. The last step involves the review of the improvement in the applying university.

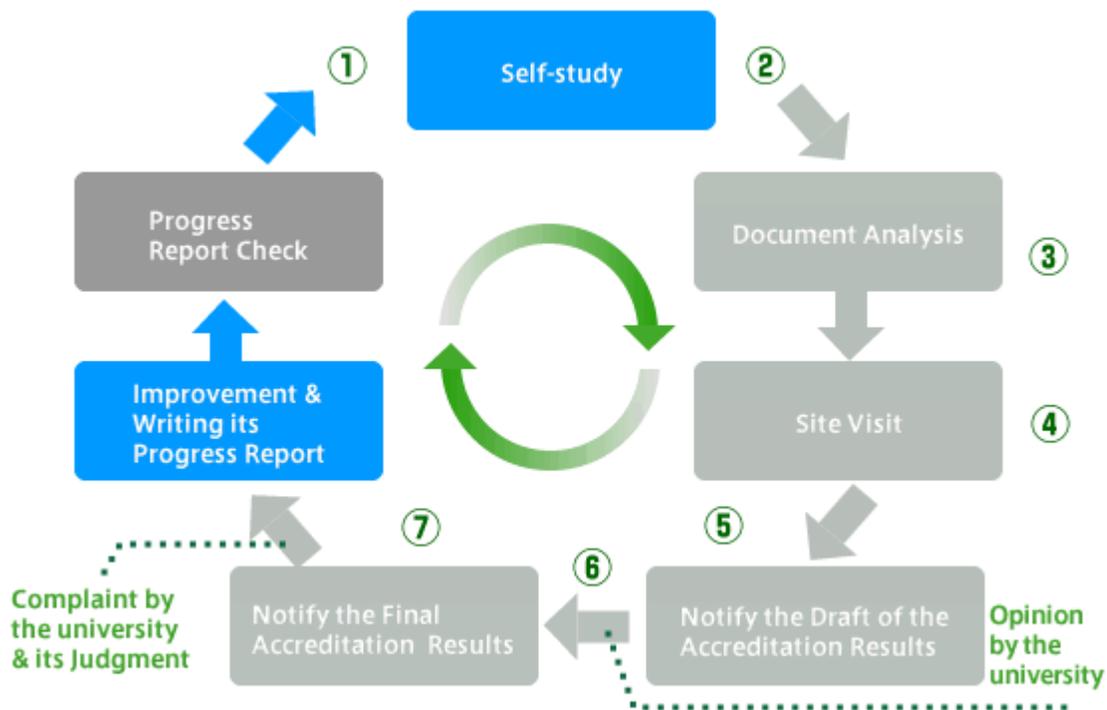


Figure 1: JUAA University evaluation process

Source: Japan University Accreditation Association

The table below shows the results of the evaluation of achievement against midterm objectives of National University Corporation and Inter-University Research Institute Corporation.

**Table 3-3 Results of the evaluation of achievements against midterm objectives**  
National university corporation (86 corporations)

	Objectives concerning education	Objectives concerning research	Other objectives
Excellent	0 (0%)	2 (2.3%)	2 (2.3%)
Good	9 (10.5%)	26 (30.2%)	32 (37.2%)
Adequate	77 (89.5%)	58 (67.4%)	52 (60.5%)
Inadequate	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Major improvements needed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Inter-university research institute corporation (4 corporations)

	Objectives concerning research	Objectives concerning joint use	Objectives concerning education	Other objectives
Excellent	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)
Good	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
Adequate	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)
Inadequate	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Major improvements needed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Figures represent the number of corporations. Figures in parentheses represent the percentage of the total number. Other objectives mean the ones concerning partnership with society and international exchange.

Figure 2: Results of evaluation of achievements

Source: National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation

Because of the system of quality assurance in Japan, majority of the universities were able to achieve their objectives both in terms of education and research (NIAD-UE, 2012). The objectives about education are concerned about the educational outcomes, what to teach, systems concerning education and assistance for students. On the other hand, the objectives regarding research are about the levels and outcomes of research and arrangements for systems to conduct research. The other objectives are about partnership with society and international exchange.

g. Incentives of Accreditation

Incentives are guaranteed for each institution, and such vary on different levels of accreditation. Such benefits and incentives are outlined by PAASCU (2006). For Levels I and II, HEIs are granted: (1) Full administrative deregulation, (2) financial deregulation, (3) authority to revise the curriculum without CHED approval, (4) authority to graduate students from accredited courses or programs of study in the levels accredited, (5) priority in the awards of grants/subsidies or funding assistance from CHED-Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) for scholarships and faculty development, facilities improvement and other development programs, (6) right to use on its publications or advertisements the word *Accredited* pursuant to CHED policies and rules, (7) limited visitation, inspection and/or supervision by CHED supervisory personnel or representatives.

The same benefits apply to those who are accredited in Level III, including: (1) Authority to offer new courses allied to existing Level III courses without need for prior approval, and (2) Privilege to apply for authority to offer new graduate programs, open learning/ distance education, extension classes and to participate in the transnational education. In Level IV, the institution is granted the benefits of Levels I, II, and III, and as well as full autonomy for the particular program, and as well as the authority to pursue (2) of Level III.

In general, although there are additional benefits as the levels of accreditation awarded progress, all the said benefits generally refer to autonomy being granted to the institution. Accredited institutions enjoy minimal interference from the agency, provided that they continue to implement the changes and/or improvements taken from the last (re)accreditation. Said benefit makes the institution's process both efficient and effective, granted that they do not have to go through so much bureaucracy in waiting for approvals for almost all major processes. Also, the institutions also get a direct incentive to have an external body to assess their strong and weak points for the purpose of continuous improvement.

#### h. Issues on accreditation in the Philippines

The insights indicated below are taken from the study conducted by Arcelo (2003). The primary issue faced by accreditation today is the attitude of institutions towards accreditation. There is some hesitation in undergoing accreditation that is rooted in the cost associated with it. This could be the costs associated with preparing for the accreditation, especially during the self-survey. In addition, if the institution has already garnered the respect of society and the academic community, it leads them to believe that accreditation is no longer necessary.

The second issue is institution accreditation versus program accreditation. HEIs generally undergo accreditation on a per program basis because this entails more focus on the curriculum offered per program and the implementation of such. This kind of accreditation, however, also factors in other components relevant to education such as student services, library, alumni affairs, etc. An institution-wide accreditation focuses on the organization as a whole and how the individual academic units pursue excellence as the collective goal. As there are a vast number of programs available, there are still quite a number of programs that do not have accreditation available to them such as medicine, mining engineering and sanitary engineering, to name a few.

Moreover, it is usually programs such as liberal arts, commerce and business administration and teaching education that get accredited first as these are courses that carry a wide share of the education market. This may imply that there may be some programs which are more structured or better organized that do not have an accredited program status simply because it is not the priority of the HEI to get it accredited due to its small market share. This may serve as a disincentive for enrollees knowing that the program they are enrolling in is not accredited which may lead to slower progress as a whole for the entire industry this course falls under.

Another issue is the voluntary nature of the accreditation system among HEIs which may work only to the advantage of those who have the means to prepare and undergo accreditation. In

order to operate, the assumption is that they have already reached the minimum standards imposed by CHED which makes them complacent, thus not motivated to improve their programs.

There also exist various agencies that are more directly linked to specific programs or courses such as the Philippine Nursing Association. There is a need for the more wide-scale accrediting agencies to establish good connections with these profession/program-based agencies.

The last issue is whether undergoing accreditation ensures the quality of the institution. If institutions do not go through accreditation, does this mean that they are of low quality? In the case of the University of the Philippines, which did not undergo any accreditation from any accrediting agency, it is one of the best performing HEIs in various degree programs. Does this discount the fact that an institution does not have to undergo accreditation to attain higher quality?

### III. ENHANCING QUALITY ASSURANCE AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its efforts to uplift the status of HEIs, promotes innovation to make higher education accessible for the young students, especially from the marginalized sector (UNESCO, 2013). In doing so, cross-border higher education will not make students and other stakeholders vulnerable to low-quality higher education. In its publication on guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education (UNESCO, 2005), UNESCO stressed the need for additional national initiatives, strengthened international cooperation and networking, and more transparency on procedures of quality assurance and accreditation.

This section discusses the various ways on how the country could improve the current state of quality assurance to help improve HEIs. It will focus on a discussion on the definition of accreditation, the main role of the oldest accrediting agency – PAASCU and directions on strengthening international cooperation, especially in the region.

#### a. Accreditation vs. quality assurance; accreditation vs. regulation

In the case of HEIs, quality could mean two things. First, CHED defines quality as the alignment of the learning environment with the institution's mission, vision and goals as manifested by its excellent learning and service outcomes (Tabora, 2012). For as long as the institution exhibits outstanding outcomes that are consistent with its vision, mission and goals, it is already considered of high quality. This may not be enough, as pointed out by Tabora (2012), because it is too general and may refer more to the institution and not so much on the learning or teaching process which involves the quality of students, teachers and research.

Another definition of quality (Tabora, 2012) is it is a standard measured against another of a similar kind. Something is of high quality if it exceeds the norm set by a governing institution. In

the case of the Philippines, it is CHED that sets the norm or standard – the minimum requirements – for HEIs to comply with.

CHED was created through the passage of Republic Act No. 7722 in the year 1994 and is mandated to perform the function of setting the minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher education institutions as well as to monitor and evaluate the performance of programs and institutions, among others. In other words, CHED's main task is to regulate HEIs – to ensure that they are meeting the minimum requirement. This goes to say that CHED should penalize underperforming HEIs, whether they be private or public institutions.

So how do we now define accreditation? Accreditation is a process that an institution goes through to ensure that they have achieved a certain level of quality. It involves the assessment of the quality – whether they are poor, good or excellent relative to the norm. This norm, as mentioned earlier, is the standard set by a governing institution that serves also as the regulatory body. Above the norm, quality is a function of excellence which should be the main goal of HEIs. Moreover, accreditation seeks to monitor and evaluate the internal processes, only to achieve higher quality of education as its end goal.

b. Accrediting agencies in the Philippines: A closer look at the PAASCU accreditation process

Institutions of various types and natures are the focus of several different accrediting bodies in the Philippines. In the field of education, where basic, secondary, and HEIs exist, different agencies are also responsible for each. For HEIs alone, several institutions stand to serve the purpose of accrediting HEIs, depending on the nature of the institution. Despite the specificity of the manner in which various accrediting agencies are geared towards particular institutions, less than 20 percent have undergone the process of accreditation (Paqueo, 2012). Evidently, there is a need to further look into the system of accreditation, its objectives, and end goals.

There are currently five accrediting agencies in the country, three of which cater to private HEIs and two to public institutions. The agencies (1) Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities; (2) Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation; and (3) Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities Accrediting Agency, Inc. that cater to private HEIs fall under the umbrella organization called Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines. On the other hand, the organization that caters to public institutions is the National Network of Quality Accrediting Agencies.

The Philippines is one of the countries to be the first to have an accrediting agency, independent of the government. PAASCU was created through the efforts of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, composed mainly of Catholic HEIs. Like other accrediting agencies, it subscribes to two steps in the accreditation process: (1) self-survey; and (2) on-site visit by members of the accrediting board.

Let us take a closer look at the criteria at the undergraduate level for programs used by an accrediting agency such as PAASCU. The survey instrument is regularly reviewed by

members of the board and other administrators. The evaluative criteria includes the following: (1) vision-mission-goals; (1.a) community involvement; (2) faculty; (3) curriculum and instruction; (4) library; (5) laboratories; (6) physical plant; (7) student services; and (8) administration.

#### *Vision-mission-goals*

Among all the eight areas being surveyed, vision-mission-goals is considered the most fundamental. The accrediting agency looks into fitness of purpose, whether the institution's outputs and actual practice reflects its vision, mission and goals. The actual practices will reveal to what extent it has come what it claims to be. Moreover, it should be determined in light of the needs of its stakeholders and the institution should include among its objectives a well-integrated program for the development of moral character and personal discipline in its students. The specific objectives/goals should be based on the institutions vision and mission. Each college and degree program is given the liberty to choose their specific objective (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

#### *Community Involvement*

The second criterion deals with the institution's capacity to involve itself in the community to help contribute to its development. Community involvement refers to the effort of the institution to relate itself to national, regional and local imperatives of development through building community awareness and producing quality graduates in the professions and vocations that can contribute to welfare development. This also means that the institution should make its programs, structures and resources responsive to the needs of the Filipino youth that faces the challenge of nation building. This should be manifested in programs, projects and activities which are well planned, organized, implemented, evaluated and supported by the institutions (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

#### *Faculty*

One of the most important pillars of the higher education institution is the faculty. The educational qualifications of faculty members should complement the needs in the college level and includes involvement in graduate studies, experience in teaching as well as possessing the enthusiasm in their profession. The selection process should involve not only administrators but other faculty members. This requires institutions to have a definite system of raking and tenure and criteria for promotion. This should include teaching performance, research and publication, special services to the college/or department, further educational attainment, community involvement, and commitment to the purposes and objectives of the college. The system for tenure should provide for an adequate probationary period. Aside from the aforementioned, teaching assignment, faculty research, community service, teaching performance, faculty development and faculty relationships are equally important (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

#### *Curriculum and instruction*

One of the most challenging of all the criteria is curriculum and instruction. The program of studies should have well-defined and clearly stated objectives and learning outcomes and should

meet prescribed standards. It should provide for a coherent and relevant curriculum that results in student achievement of the institution's objectives and the program's intended learning outcomes. Moreover, it should also provide practical experiences directly related to the professional roles for which students are being prepared. In terms of the teaching-learning process, it should be appropriate, varied, and should facilitate the wholistic development of students. The process should reflect the institution's teaching-learning framework and there should be a variety of teaching-learning methodologies. This goes to say that the learning environment should be conducive that should reflect self-discipline, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Aside from the criteria aforementioned, the following are considered equality important: assessment of learning outcomes, supervision of instructional program, co-curricular programs, and academic consultation/advising (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Library*

One of the important factors in accreditation is considering the facilities for learning particularly library. It is of paramount importance to both students and faculty as it is a vital component of the academic environment. It should contain and provide access to information resources essential for members of the academic community. This goes to say that the library should have a mission statement, vision statement and goals to serve as a framework. The mission and goals should be consistent with the institution. Of equal importance are the inputs such as collections, personnel, financial support, administrative support and physical facilities. On the other hand, outputs are also considered such as number of books purchased, catalogued, circulated, number of reference questions answered. The third important factor is outcomes that pertain to the impact of the library's resources and programs on stakeholders. The available technology, greater use of online services, skills and increasing participation in information networks are also considered (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Laboratories*

This is also an important aspect of the evaluative criteria that considers the space, supplies, equipment and features desired of good laboratories to assist in the attainment of course objectives. For one, there should special laboratories adequately equipped to meet the needs of the science courses. Aside from science courses, business administration requires an incubator room for entrepreneurship. And the list goes on for other specialized courses that require a laboratory. The second important factor considered is equipment and supplies for the various laboratories. Moreover, the institution should continually maintain its science and technological laboratory facilities and equipment by the improvement and expansion through the acquisition of up-to-date equipment, apparatus and supplies. In order to prevent untoward accidents in the laboratory, there should be safety checks and first aid facilities available (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Physical plant*

Part of the criteria includes an evaluation of site, campus, buildings, equipment and building services. First, the site should be located in a wholesome environment and should be provided with adequate facilities for drainage and sewage disposal. The campus should be planned so it will be

adequate for the social, physical, cultural, and religious needs of the school. It should also be provided with sufficient facilities for intramural programs and for physical education classes and athletic activities.

Buildings should be functionally designed and at the same time conducive to a quiet and serious learning environment. They should be well-planned to include entrances and exits enough for the population and to meet future expansion needs. In terms of building services, it should be well-illuminated and well-ventilated. The size and number of classrooms should be sufficient to accommodate the population. Moreover, there should be ample facilities for other services such as an auditorium, gymnasium, food areas, office and staff room, student activity areas, and clinic (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Student Services*

The institution should also a venue for the students to develop their personality thus a program of student services is deemed as an integral part. First of all, the program for student services should be in line with the vision, mission and goals and it should be supported by physical facilities and adequate financial resources. Second, the admissions program should provide for the proper selection and direction of prospective students. Third, the institution should have an orientation program for new students as well as to reorient old students. Fourth, the institution should have a guidance program which should offer the following services: individual inventory service, testing, information service, individual and group counselling, and placement and follow-up services. Fifth, there should also be a well-organized student support services program that provides financial aid, health services among others. Next, the institution should provide a variety of relevant co-curricular activities that contribute to student development. Lastly, the alumni should be formally organized to draw on their resources for employment, support for development plans and other worthy activities (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Administration*

An integral part of the institution is the administrative organization which is responsible for formulating the general policies. It is important that the administrative organization and governance is efficient and should be guided by principles of good governance as manifested in the consistency of policies to the vision, mission, goals and core values. They should be supported by equally competent staff of non-academic personnel. Moreover, there should be a good record system of minutes of the meeting and other important documents. Other factors considered in this criterion are the effectiveness of the instructional administration, financial or business administration, institutional planning and development, administration of public relations, and internal quality assurance system (PAASCU Undergraduate Survey Instrument, 2010).

### *Program level accreditation*

Based on the criteria of the PAASCU undergraduate survey, most of it pertains to the institution as a whole. But these factors are considered even if it is only at the program level that accreditation takes place. These factors are deemed important in making sure that the program is effective and produces quality students. The effectiveness of the program is not only measured in terms of the number of graduates nor in the passing rate in board exams. The accreditation process

is more holistic since it values the other aspects of the institution that are equally important in building and strengthening its students, faculty, research, teaching and community service.

The PAASCU accreditation process does not solely consider the passing rate in licensure exams or employment rate because these only reflect one aspect of the institution which is the academic side. The inputs should also be given credit as they contribute to the overall development of the students and the entire community. For most universities and colleges that produce graduates with a general education (more holistic) background, considering the inputs are very important that the graduates do not only meet certain skill requirements in the labor market but they are well-rounded enough to adapt to any situation. This is contrary to technical or vocational schools that produce a more specialized type of graduate. Based on this, accreditation is all about monitoring and evaluating internal processes that will eventually lead to higher quality of education.

c. Status of accreditation among higher education institutions

Since accreditation for HEIs is voluntary, one of the drawbacks is that only a few colleges and universities go through accreditation. To date, there are 1,871 programs that have undergone accreditation plus 462 programs that are candidates (applying for accreditation). According to Tayag and Calimlim (2003), there are around 20,000 registered programs in the country which bring the accreditation rate (including candidates) to only a little above 10 percent. Out of those that applied for accreditation for both PAASCU, PACUCOA and AACCUP, most of the programs have been granted level II status (33 percent). While only 3 percent have received a level IV status.

Table 1. Total number of accredited programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	462	20%
I	625	27%
II	768	33%
III	399	17%
IV	79	3%
	2333	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

The next tables present the general assessment of programs across different accrediting agencies namely PAASCU, PACUCOA and AACCUP. Most of the programs accredited by these agencies have either a level I or II accreditation status.

Table 2. Total number of accredited accountancy programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	12	21.4
I	19	33.9
II	15	26.8
III	8	14.3
IV	2	3.6
	56	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

For the Accountancy program, majority of those that are offered fall within the Candidate to Level II bracket, although majority of the Accountancy programs fall within the Level I category, and generally in the Candidate to Level II categories.

Table 3. Total number of accredited architecture programs among HEIs

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	6	40.0
I	5	33.3
II	4	26.7
III	0	0.0
IV	0	0.0
	15	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

It is evident in the frequency table that Architecture degrees being offered have yet to move forward in terms of quality assessment. Majority, or 40 percent of the 15 colleges and universities accredited are only at the Candidate status, while there are no Architecture programs that fall within the brackets of Level III and IV.

Table 4. Total number of accredited chemical engineering programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	0	0.0
I	4	44.4
II	4	44.4
III	1	11.1
IV	0	0.0
	9	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Majority of the accredited Chemical Engineering programs are in Levels I and II. None of which were accredited in the Level IV status.

Table 5. Total number of accredited civil engineering programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	8	15.4
I	15	28.8
II	20	38.5
III	6	11.5
IV	3	5.8
	52	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

The number of Civil Engineering programs accredited is quite notable, as it is greater than most other programs. The largest proportion of such programs are accredited in Level II, with a significant number in the initial levels, i.e. Candidate and I as compared to the latter ones, i.e. III and IV.

Table 6. Total number of accredited criminology programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	13	30.2
I	13	30.2
II	16	37.2
III	0	0.0
IV	1	2.3
	43	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Interestingly enough, a significant number of Criminology programs have also been accredited, although most are at their infancy in terms of accreditation, while only one has been granted Level IV status.

Table 7. Total number of accredited dentistry programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	3	30.0
I	2	20.0
II	2	20.0
III	2	20.0
IV	1	10.0
	10	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

The frequency of the accreditation of Dentistry programs is almost normally distributed, with majority equally spread out to Levels I-III.

Table 7. Total number of accredited elementary education programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	10	25.6
I	11	28.2
II	11	28.2
III	6	15.4
IV	1	2.6
	39	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

As with the other programs, majority of the Elementary Education programs accredited are almost equally spread out to the lower half, or from Candidate Level up to Level II. However, a significant number is also accredited in Levels III and IV.

Table 8. Total number of accredited electronics and communications engineering programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	4	18.2
I	9	40.9
II	5	22.7
III	3	13.6
IV	1	4.5
	22	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Most ECE programs (40 percent) are accredited in Level I status. The rest are spread-out to the different accreditation levels, indicative of progress in the particular program.

Table 9. Total number of accredited BS elementary education programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	15	8.4
I	40	22.3
II	75	41.9
III	39	21.8
IV	10	5.6
	179	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

An exceptional number of Elementary Education programs have been accredited, with majority falling under the Level II category. The frequency is similar to a normal-shaped curve, with the two contrasting levels, Candidate and IV, each having the least number of institutions.

Table 10. Total number of accredited BS secondary education programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	19	9.2
I	47	22.8
II	88	42.7
III	42	20.4
IV	10	4.9
	206	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Interestingly, even more Secondary Education programs have been accredited, likewise following a normal-shaped curve, with Level II having the most number of accredited programs.

Table 11. Total number of accredited elementary and secondary education programs among HEIs

	Elem	Sec	Total
Candidate	15	19	34
I	40	47	87
II	75	88	163
III	39	42	81
IV	10	10	20

Source: MIS, CHED

Altogether, the Elementary & Secondary Education programs of different colleges and university follow a normal-shaped curve.

Table 12. Total number of accredited marine engineering programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	2	14.3
I	4	28.6
II	3	21.4
III	4	28.6
IV	1	7.1
	14	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Marine Engineering programs are well-scattered among the different accreditation categories, with majority falling under Levels I and III.

Table 13. Total number of accredited mechanical engineering programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	7	18.9
I	9	24.3
II	15	40.5
III	6	16.2

IV	0	0.0
	37	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Most programs of Mechanical Engineering being offered fall under the Level II category, while none fall under Level IV.

Table 14. Total number of accredited nursing programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	25	27.5
I	26	28.6
II	24	26.4
III	12	13.2
IV	4	4.4
	91	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

There is a considerable number of nursing programs being offered by different colleges and universities. One can also observe that the programs are well-distributed among the different levels, with most being at Level I, although only by a relatively small margin.

Table 15. Total number of accredited pharmacy programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	4	30.8
I	2	15.4
II	5	38.5
III	1	7.7
IV	1	7.7
	13	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

Most Pharmacy programs fall under the Level II category, while the rest mostly fall under the Candidate to Level I categories.

Table 16. Total number of accredited physical therapy programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
Candidate	4	33.3
I	3	25.0
II	4	33.3
III	1	8.3
IV	0	0.0
	12	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

There are a considerable number of Physical Therapy programs under the Candidate and Level II categories. However, no program has been accredited into Level IV, yet.

Let us now look into the programs accredited by PAASCU. The next tables show the various programs that were accredited as of this year 2013. To date, there are a total of 400 accredited programs by PAASCU. Most of the accredited programs are in level II with 53 percent while only 13 percent have attained level IV accreditation. The programs that have the highest level (level IV) of accreditation from private universities are AB and BS Communications, Arts and Sciences, Philosophy, Psychology, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computer Science, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Elementary and Secondary Education, Environmental Planning and Management, Accountancy, Business Administration, and Nursing.

Table 17. Total number of PAASCU accredited programs among HEIs

	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percent</i>
I	57	14%
II	210	53%
III	82	21%
IV	51	13%
	400	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

The programs Elementary and Secondary education are the most accredited programs by PAASCU, followed by Accountancy and Nursing. The frequency distribution of Accountancy programs accredited follows a normal-shaped curve, with most of the programs falling under Levels II and III. On the other hand, most of the Civil Engineering programs fall under Level II, and none under Level III. Two out of three Chemical Engineering programs accredited by PAASCU fall into the Level II category, and one into the Level III category. No degree programs have been accredited into Levels I and IV. Most Electrical Engineering programs are clearly in their infancy stages, as

none have been accredited into Levels III and IV, while only three into Level II, and one into Level I. Majority of the ECE programs are under the Level II category, although only four programs have been accredited. For Elementary Education and Secondary Education, most are accredited under Level II, while the rest are distributed among the other levels.

Table 18. Selected programs accredited by PAASCU

		I	II	III	IV	TOTAL
Accountancy	<i>frequency</i>	3	5	5	2	15
	<i>percent</i>	20.0	33.3	33.3	13.3	100.0
Civil Engineering	<i>frequency</i>	2	5	0	2	9
	<i>percent</i>	22.2	55.6	0.0	22.2	100.0
Chemical Engineering	<i>frequency</i>	0	2	1	0	3
	<i>percent</i>	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	100.0
Electrical Engineering	<i>frequency</i>	1	3	0	0	4
	<i>percent</i>	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
ECE	<i>frequency</i>	0	3	0	1	4
	<i>percent</i>	0.0	75.0	0.0	25.0	100.0
Nursing	<i>frequency</i>	1	9	1	3	14
	<i>percent</i>	7.1	64.3	7.1	21.4	100.0
Elementary Education	<i>frequency</i>	5	24	11	6	46
	<i>percent</i>	10.9	52.2	23.9	13.0	100.0
Secondary Education	<i>frequency</i>	6	24	10	6	46
	<i>percent</i>	13.0	52.2	21.7	13.0	100.0

Source: MIS, CHED

#### d. Outcomes-based and typology-based quality assurance framework

In trying to improve the quality assurance system of HEIs, the Commission on Higher Education came up with the CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) no. 46 which focuses on learning competency based standards and outcomes-based system of quality assurance based on the type of HEI. The said CMO seeks to enhance the quality assurance system of private and public HEIs in the country. First of all, outcomes-based standards or learning competency-based standards is based on a student-centered lifelong learning framework. Outcomes-based education is anchored on the idea that the course content is developed in terms of learning outcomes. In this case, the outcomes are the set of learning competencies that enable learner's to perform complex tasks/functions/roles (CHED, 2012). This involves a shift from input-oriented curricular designed based on the description of course to outcomes-based education.

Based on the guidelines for the implementation of the CMO 46, inputs may be considered as part of the strategies in achieving the goal. The level of attainment of outcomes shows how much of these goals have been achieved. The outcome-based quality assurance refers to the process of looking at the level at which the inputs, methods and execution produce the desired learning competencies for the graduates of that program (CHED, 2012). In essence, this means that HEIs should identify quality indicators of output such as percentage of passing in the licensure exam or percentage of employment (CHED, 2012).

A typology-based quality assurance, on the other hand, refers to the establishment of a more appropriate quality assurance and development interventions for specific types of HEIs since each have a different vision and mission. It would give a clearer focus on each type of HEIs role in the context of national development goals. The result of this would be increased internal efficiency to ensure that the HEI's programs are comparable to similar programs (CHED, 2012). This implies that HEIs will have to review their program offerings because the programs that they offer should be in line with their vision, mission and goals.

Our economy needs individuals with high-level academic, technical, behavioral, and thinking skills to improve human capital base and produce a strong labor force, as well as higher education institutions (HEIs) with the capacity to do research and engage in innovation to increase productivity (World Bank 2011). Recognizing the importance of higher education in delivering such skills and research, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued CMO 46 in pursuit of the Government's commitment to the "evolving efforts to recognize and develop a system of comparable qualifications, degrees, and diplomas across the Asia-Pacific region," and the "acceptance of internationally-agreed-upon frameworks and mechanisms for the global practice of professions" (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article 1, Section 5).

Specifically, CHED has implemented its reform to enable acquisition of knowledge and develop skills, which will enhance productivity, and global competitiveness of students and graduates. This policy direction is therefore very crucial if the government wants to move up the value chain beyond production processes by nurturing pools of well-educated workers who are able to perform multiple and complex tasks and adapt to the rapidly changing and evolving working environment (World Bank 2011).

This innovative move in HEIs is the rationalization of the quality assurance (QA) processes and procedures in Philippine higher education through an outcomes-based (OB) and typology-based (TB) QA. There are two approaches in the outcomes-based evaluation (OBE). One is program approach, which is a direct assessment of educational outcomes, and the other is institutional, which is an audit of the quality system of HEIs (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article III, Section 16). The program approach assesses programs, whether programs meet national and international standards, i.e., "at the level at which the inputs, methods, and execution produce the desired learning competencies for the graduates of that program as determined by the Technical Committees/Technical Panels and as measured by appropriate assessments" (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article III, Section 16). The institutional approach assesses the whole institutional system, whether it is functional and operational, i.e., whether the systems that support the achievement of

the desired learning outcomes are aligned with the “vision, mission, and goals of the institution” (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article III, Section 16).

With the implementation of CMO 46, HEIs will have competitive advantage in the world and the presence of quality assurance (QA) systems will improve HEIs quality of education, which is expected to result to enhanced productivity and competitiveness of students and graduates.

In the case of the TBQA, the emphasis is given to the following components: internal quality assurance system, local and international accreditation of programs, national and international linkages and outreach programs, and student and faculty research and publication. It replaces the “one-size-fits-all” QA system with horizontal and vertical TBQA. The horizontal TB is made up of three types of higher education institutions, namely, professional institutions, colleges, and universities. These HEIs differ in terms of program offerings, qualifications of faculty members, support structures, learning resources, translating their vision/mission/goals into learning outcomes, programs and systems, and community outreach activities (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article V, Section 22). Universities differ from the other two HEIs in a sense that its academic degree programs must be research oriented.

As for the vertical TBQA, HEIs are also classified into three, namely, autonomous, deregulated, and regulated. These HEIs are differentiated according to these elements: “alignment and consistency of the learning environment with the institution’s vision, mission, and goals; demonstration of exceptional learning and service outcomes; and development of a culture of quality” (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article VI, Section 24). Both the autonomous and deregulated HEIs should demonstrate “excellent program outcomes through a high proportion of accredited programs, the presence of Centers of Excellence and/or Development, and/or international certification” (CHED 2012: CMO 46, Article VI, Section 25). Greater autonomy in higher education allows for better matching of skills and research between HEIs and the labor market (World Bank 2011).

There is still more to gain in higher education delivery for the country to attain a higher level of productivity and growth. This is reflected in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) 2014-15, wherein the Philippines ranked 29 (out of 144 countries, up by 16 spaces from the GCI 2012-13) in terms of quality higher education, with a weighted score of 4.5 (out of 7 being extremely well). In terms of availability of specialized research and training services, the country ranked 49 (out of 144 countries, up by 13 spaces from the GCI 2012-13) with a weighted score of 4.4 (out of 7 widely available) (World Economic Forum: Global Competitiveness Report 2014-15). Hence, policy reforms should focus on developing skills to improve quality of graduates and building capacity for research in the universities.

#### e. Impact on private and public HEIs

The proposed outcomes- and typology-based quality assessment framework has some implications on HEIs. For one, private and public HEIs have a slightly unequal playing field because of CHED’s jurisdiction over public HEIs or state universities and colleges. The creation and conversion of state universities and colleges (SUCs) are governed by a charter, law or a

legislation passed by Congress. Moreover, local universities and colleges (LUCs) as part of local government units are ensured local autonomy by the Constitution. In the case of private HEIs, they are directly regulated by CHED. Without proper enforcement, the quality assessment framework could only affect the private HEIs (CEAP, 2012).

This now brings us to the second implication which pertains to the academic freedom granted to HEIs. Based on Republic Act 7722, Section 13, the Constitution protects the academic freedom of HEIs. According to CEAP (2012), academic freedom includes not only the freedom of professionally qualified persons to inquire, discover, publish and teach the truth but also the right to decide for itself – its aims, objectives and how best to achieve them. Given this, any quality assurance framework developed by government that is based on a certain set of standards may not necessarily apply to the HEI which may restrict their academic freedom. For as long as the HEIs are meeting the minimum requirements/standards set by CHED, they should be given the chance on how best to exemplify academic excellence the best way they know (CEAP, 2012).

The voluntary nature of the accreditation system currently in place protects the academic freedom of the HEIs. Those who are ready to undergo accreditation voluntarily submit themselves based on their capacity and preparedness. Some HEIs, on the other hand, who do not go through accreditation are not necessarily performing below standards. They simply choose not to because of their academic freedom but they still manage to perform excellently compared to other HEIs.

#### f. Directions for HEIs in the ASEAN Community 2015

In preparation for the ASEAN Community 2015, there are efforts to develop a system of comparable qualifications, degrees, and diplomas across the Asia-Pacific region with the support of UNESCO and other multilateral agencies. Private HEIs for instance that have exchange programs with universities in other countries are constantly developing ways to improve their programs and curriculum. They are successful in getting recognition from other universities through a memorandum of agreement for the exchange faculty or exchange students, which is one indicator that their programs are of high quality to be recognized by other institutions.

Other countries in the region such as Singapore and Malaysia link their accreditation system with that of other countries. Yap (2012) identifies several international accreditation systems that Malaysia has ties with. This includes the Australian Universities Quality Agency, New Zealand Qualifications Authority, National Education Standards and Quality Assessment in Thailand, University Association Quality Assurance Network in Singapore, as well as the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network. The internationalization of the accreditation systems ensures HEIs in Malaysia to maintain the quality of their programs, curriculum, and the overall learning environment.

One of the initiatives of the ASEAN regional integration is to encourage international education cooperation among member countries which includes people exchange, transnational education, information exchange, and regulatory reform (Yap, 2012). People exchange includes not only students but professors as well in various disciplines to share ideas and best practices. Yap (2012) identified three modes of trade in education services namely cross-border supply, commercial presence of foreign institutions, and presence of foreigner teachers.

The overall concept of accreditation takes on a new path as countries face the challenges that globalization bring. The growing demand for skilled workers and high value added products puts

pressure on countries that try to compete in the international market. Moreover, the clamor for a more sustainable economic growth can be addressed through the quality of HEIs. The accreditation process is thus vital in ensuring the success of all these.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the current state of accreditation of HEIs in the Philippines. The accreditation in the Philippines is voluntary and is a process to ensure that the institution has reached a certain level of quality. There are five accrediting agencies, three (PAASCU, PACU-COA, ACSCU-AAI) of which cater to private colleges and universities and fall under the umbrella organization Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines while two agencies (AACCUP & ALCU-COA) cater to public colleges and universities. The voluntary nature of the accreditation system in the country has resulted in a very low turn-out rate, with a little over 10 percent of the total number of programs have undergone accreditation. The accreditation system relies on both outcome- and input-based criteria and considers several indicators of quality. The main goal is to ensure that the HEIs applying for program accreditation exceeds the minimum standards set by CHED.

The accreditation process in the Philippines is similar to some countries in Asia such as that of South Korea, India and Japan. As discussed earlier, accreditation in these countries is initiated by the private sector and is also voluntary which preserves the academic freedom of institutions to decide in accordance with its own vision, mission and goals. This is the main advantage of having a voluntary accreditation system initiated by the private sector. The HEI has a choice as to what accrediting agency will suit its needs based on its vision, mission and goals. On the other hand, it creates complacency on the part of the HEI to get accreditation since it is not required. There is not much motivation, for as long as they have met the minimum standards. However, the opposite may be true because those who undergo accreditation experience an improvement in their programs because of the process of internal and external quality assurance. It keeps the institution motivated to adhere to its prescribed vision, mission and goals.

Promoting high quality among HEIs has always been the goal of accrediting agencies. In the case of PAASCU, the oldest accrediting agency, quality as fitness of purpose is deemed important. This goes to say that the learner outcomes should reflect the vision, mission and goals of the institution. Academic excellence can be measured by student learning outcomes and this can be achieved through the inputs. High quality cannot be measured alone by the outputs because it does not reflect the true status of the institution. An institution which has a very selective process in choosing their students will most likely produce good graduates but this does not necessarily mean that the inputs such as quality of teaching, infrastructure and support services are performing well and are aligned with the institution's vision, mission and goals.

Most of the programs that receive accreditation are those in the field of education, engineering, accountancy, and sciences. Given this, it is only more effective to field more scholars into these programs with high accreditation level. Investing in scholarships geared towards engineering and science will help contribute to human capital development which in return will benefit the country.

#### *Policy agenda reforms in accreditation system*

Efforts to improve the state of HEIs are underway especially as the ASEAN Community 2015 unfolds. There is still more room for changes as both private and public HEIs seek to be more competitive in the region and the world. Despite these efforts, the most basic issue of strictly enforcing the current CHED policies on minimum requires for a program still needs to be

addressed. Though there is a minimum standard, there are still HEIs with programs that are performing badly as reflected in their board passing rate and low employment rate in their respective fields.

The first policy agenda reform is for CHED to strictly implement the minimum standards and monitor HEIs that are underperforming. Sanctions should be enforced on non-compliant HEIs in order to ensure the quality of the outcomes. Monitoring the HEIs plays a very important role in ensuring that they adhere to the norm – minimum standards. This could be more viable instead of imposing higher standards that may add to the burden of CHED when this could be done by the institutions themselves when they apply for accreditation. The merits from accreditation should serve as a motivation for HEIs to pursue the process and eventually this results in improved inputs and outcomes. Monitoring and regulation should be done for both private and public HEIs.

This brings us to our second policy agenda which is to review the “autonomy” that state universities and colleges enjoy. Currently, state universities and colleges are created or converted into law while local universities and colleges are created by local legislation. The problem with this is that it may be difficult for CHED, in the exercise of its quasi-legislative powers, cannot be superior over a law. There should be an equal playing field between private and public HEIs. With this, the creation and retention of HEIs will be based on performance and not on other reasons.

The quality assurance framework involves two aspects. One is internal quality assurance which refers to the institution’s initiative to assess its capacity to translate its vision, mission and goals into desired learning outcomes; establish proper learning environment; and review against performance indicators and standards (CEAP, 2012). Another aspect is external quality assurance which refers to the process by which the HEI submits itself to evaluation and monitoring by an external evaluating body. In line with this, our third policy agenda is to ensure that the evaluation and monitoring of programs include the direct assessment of educational inputs and learning outcomes based on the institution’s vision, mission and goals. The output or outcome should not be the sole basis of consideration because there are some institutions that set high standards in choosing their students that even if the inputs of the institution are not necessarily good (teaching, research, facilities, etc.) and it turns out that they still perform well in board examinations. This is opposed to an institution who produces good graduates who are not necessarily outstanding when they entered but ended up performing well in board exams. There could be a selection bias to begin with which may not be captured by the evaluation, if the inputs are not included.

In addition, an evaluation of the quality system (this could also be a compliance system) of an institution to determine whether the system is effective in delivering the appropriate outcomes also important. The external quality assurance will take care of this and their main task will be to ensure that the institution’s systems are working.

Monitoring and regulating HEIs in the country is not an easy task as there are so many of them. It seems like a daunting task but the compliance of each would make things easier. Compliance with the minimum standard set by CHED will only be possible with strict enforcement and monitoring. The various accrediting agencies will serve as an external auditor that would cater to the different HEIs based on their specialization.

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## APPENDICES

### **Focused Group Discussion on Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines October 4, 2013**

**Present:**      **Fr. Joel Tabora, SJ**  
                  **Dr. Carmelita Quebengco**  
                  **Dr. Olivia Legaspi**  
                  **Dr. Sonia Gementiza**  
                  **Dr. Robert Roleda**  
                  **Dr. Brian Gozun**  
                  **Ms. Teresa Perez**

HEI offices of the government (CHED) defines the basic minimum requirements, monitor the performance of the schools and see to it that the basic minimum requirement are not violated and reward the schools but not to the extent to do the accreditation themselves. Not to determine the criteria for accreditation and do the accreditation.

Accreditation is not so expensive, you just have to pay the travel expense of the accreditor, even the accreditor is not paid, and it's more of voluntary. The school can give the accreditor a token but not cash, not even gift cheques. Parents look at the accreditation level of a school and determine whether or not they should enrol their children to that school. All schools want to be accredited, but there are times when the school thinks that they will not be accredited, then they won't apply. Accreditation is not even a requirement of CHED. Even in most countries, accreditation is voluntary.

During the accreditation, we don't only look at the compliance of the minimum requirements, but the going beyond the minimum requirement.

Each university or institution has its own mission-vision and it cannot have its own generic institutional assessment that does not look into the mission and vision of the school. CHED looks at certain frameworks and not at the mission and vision of the school. So there is problem with the system.

#### **Is the accreditation process optimal?**

There is no international agreement on what quality is. Even though there is no universal definition of quality, it always has something to do with minimum standards. Minimum standards have to be defined by something or someone who has the authority. But we know that between the minimum and excellent level, there is a wide range. Academic excellence can be measured by the student learning outcomes, the practicing the outcomes of teaching processes, so there can be an assurance of the quality of teaching. Minimum standards can be expressed in student learning outcomes. Quality is seen in whether an HEI achieves its mission and vision. Check whether the mission and vision using the outcomes. As an institution, you should also achieve the expectations of the public.

In the past, it's all about exceeding the minimum standards, but not it's more of outcomes based, fitness for purpose. Quality assurance has something to do with protecting the student learner outcomes. How can it be achieved? By the inputs. Quality assurance is all about inputs and outputs. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is different from outcomes based quality assurance. OBE only looks at the outcomes, they don't look whether the students go to class or if the teachers even teach the subject. Remove the outcomes based, then you'll have quality assurance. HEIs want to be under somebody because they are too lazy to do their own thinking. There is a big difference between DEPED and CHED because of the academic freedom.

### **Is the instrument used by PAASCU reflects the performance based or outcome based?**

Accreditation is a part of high quality assurance. The Philippines is the 3<sup>rd</sup> country with accreditation, the world looks at us. CHED is the only one who doesn't recognize it. There is no such thing as an international quality assurance, nor national. Universities have the academic freedom, we are supposed to be autonomous, be more liberal than basic ed, train students to be independent, stand up for their rights and think critically and therefore the governance of the university should reflect that. If all HEIs undergo accreditation, there is a conflict, it violates the freedom of universities specifically vision, mission and the level of quality they will reach, any organization has no power to require HEIs to undergo accreditation.

When you move beyond the minimum standards, insitutions have distinguished themselves to strive for excellence. But when your institution is not as good as UP or La Salle or Ateneo, You need a lot of investments to achieve the excellent level for an institution, you need competitive salary for teachers, and good facilities. In the private sector, quality is proportionate to the input. It is not everything since outcome is also important. Government demands high level of quality education without inputting resources to the private sector. It is called unfunded mandates. The government demands private institutions to improve on some areas, otherwise they will go out of business. The private sector puts all the resources together while the government tries to regulate, don't increase tuition, don't go into contract together.

The accreditation system is both outcome and input based. The assumption of others is that when output is good, inputs are also good. Looking only at outcomes is not enough. Given an example, a university with very high selectivity ratio will produce good outcomes no matter what. To begin with, students are really good, even though they don't study or teachers don't teach, the outcome will still be good. Another scenario, given a class that is not academically equipped but 80% of the class still made it through. Compare that to a class where most are really good. Given the scenario, you cannot rate the teacher based on the outcome.

Nothing should impair the academic freedom.

CHED is arguing that there are a lot of HEIs when in fact, they are the ones who approved for the operation of these universities. Trying to be the accrediting agency is not the solution. The fair

decision to make is to ask universities to maintain a certain standard and if they don't meet them, ask the institution to shut down.

### **Do private HEIs and SUCs have the same motivation regarding the accreditation?**

It was the catholic schools who started accreditation in the Philippines because of the self-driven autonomy to provide quality education, schools help one another. The movement in the accreditation is an independent accrediting bond, independent of the universities, market and the government. It is to secure the academic integrity of your service. An example, the number of people getting employed, we produce a lot of graduates who finished Chemical Engineering but they cannot find a job because he's so qualified. CHED is happy if all students are in call centers. Jobs are not an appropriate standard of education quality. There are other things you have consider.

### **Do we need to have an independent evaluating body that will evaluate an accrediting agency?**

We have a number of accrediting bodies. There are different accrediting bodies depending on the nature of university. There is an accrediting body for catholic schools, protestant schools and stock profit. For the non-stock, all the profits are plowed back to the school, nobody benefits from the profit. There is no need for an independent accrediting body because determining what the quality is really depends on the school. You go an accrediting agency that values what you value. Universities and institutions should be independent on external agencies telling them what they should be. Because when they become dependent, they end up losing what they value. As long as accreditation is something that is voluntary, you cannot have a single accrediting body. Even though the accreditation is not obligatory, there are sanctions.

### **Is CHED effective in improving the quality of education?**

PAASCU accredited school have more access to international recognition than CHED accredited schools. CHED is not doing what it's supposed to do. They are supposed to set a high level of standard for institutions to improve the quality of education.

CHED does not affect SUCs but rather private schools. Private schools close when they don't meet the minimum standards set by the CHED, they only appeal to state colleges.

### **As accreditors do you take some time to evaluate the instrument itself?**

Every year. During the general assembly, member schools are there and suggestions are taken into consideration. Different accrediting bodies have different criteria. It depends on the value and what is important to the school. You cannot direct accreditation from the government because the quality should be determined by the school.

Every person in the government has a limited mind and education. With HEI you have to do that with great humility because you are talking about colleagues. When you have different accrediting bodies you hope that they will come together, exchange ideas and try to improve themselves. But you don't put the government who says, unless you do it my way, you're going out of business. We have to secure, protect the academic freedom.

### **Do these accreditations help improve the quality of HEIs?**

Those with low passing rates are not accredited. You should be above the national passing average for the last 5 years. During accreditation, HEIs get the response from accrediting agencies telling them the specific areas they should improve on. Other the accrediting agency won't recognize the university. UP Diliman doesn't even believe in accreditation, but is able to preserve a high quality of education. Accreditation is not a guarantee that you will develop to maximize your potential, maybe you can go beyond more than the levels of accreditation.

Accreditation vs. Regulation. The quality regulation part is something that should be looked at. Because CHED is not able to regulate properly. CHED can ask schools that if their program that has a board exam is not equal or above the national average, they should close the program. But nobody is doing that. CHED should strictly implement their regulations.

There are also political issues surrounding the CHED.

PAASCU should always be aware of what is new globally.