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Different approaches to ensure the credibility and consistency of accreditation decisions, lessons learnt from SACSCOC

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Vietnamese context

- Five accrediting centers:
 - VNU CEA – Hanoi
 - CEA HCM – HCM
 - CEA – DNU
 - CEA- Vinh University
 - CEA-AVU&C

The debates around the autonomy and independence of these agencies.



Objectives of the project

To critically investigate how an accrediting agency in the United States operates in terms of **ensuring the credibility and consistency of accreditation decisions**. The **contextual and cultural values** of Vietnam will be then considered to draw lessons for accrediting agencies in Vietnam.

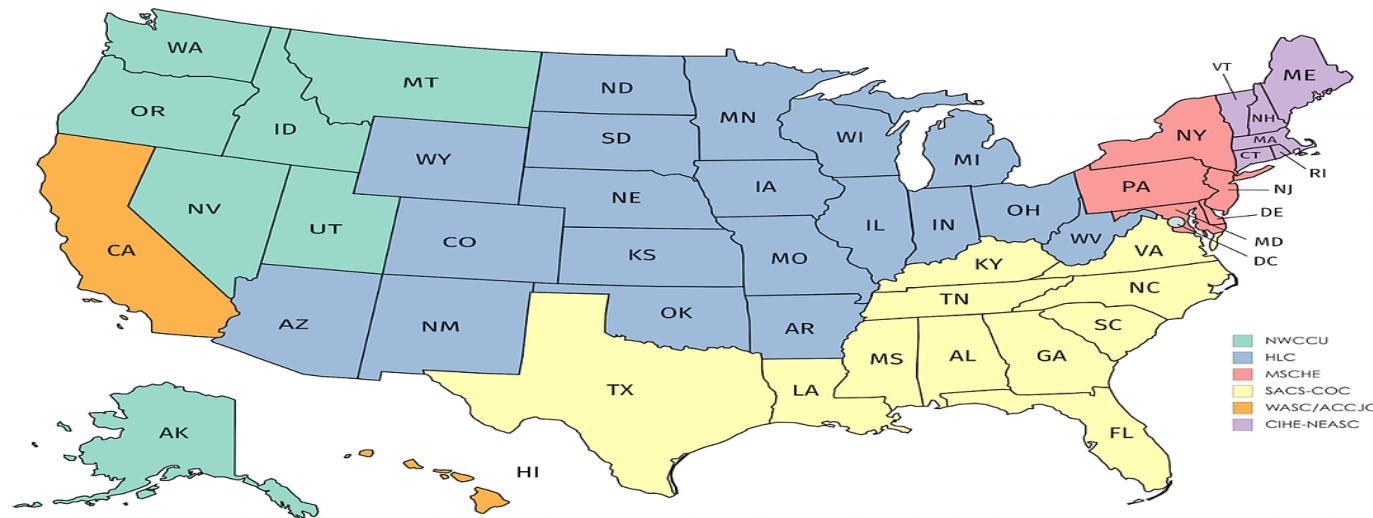




SACSCOC - The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

SACSCOC - A regional accreditor

Geographic Scope of Regional Accreditors



Not shown on map:

WASC/ACCJC: Pacific Region (Guam, American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands.)

MSCHE: Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands



Lesson 1

Vietnam establishes a similar council to share best practices and guidelines. The one like C-RAC.

C-RAC- Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

Vietnam currently has five accrediting agencies; to ensure the consistency across the agencies in the decision-making process,



Lesson 2

Re-visit the missions of accrediting agencies, adding “to improve effectiveness of higher education institutions.”

- The mission of SACSCOC is to assure the educational quality and improve the effectiveness of its member institutions.
- Vietnam agencies’ missions only focus on quality improvement.

This will perhaps require a comprehensive analysis of the current Vietnamese accreditation standards.



Lesson 3

Autonomy of accrediting agencies

In a near future, it is also necessary for Vietnamese accrediting agencies to demonstrate their accountability and certify the quality of the agency through similar practices developed in the U.S., recognition.

- SACSCOC is an independent, not-for-profit, and non-governmental organization, recognized by USDE and CHEA.



Lesson 4

The ownership of accreditation standards – autonomy of an accrediting agency

- * Peer evaluators and HEIs in Vietnam indicate disagreement with the accreditation standards developed by MoET (Pham, 2018), leading to large disparities in accreditation decisions.
- * For the time being, there should be a policy from QA agencies to ensure that all peer evaluators interpret the accreditation standards in a consistent way, or at least share similar understandings of the standards.



Lesson 5

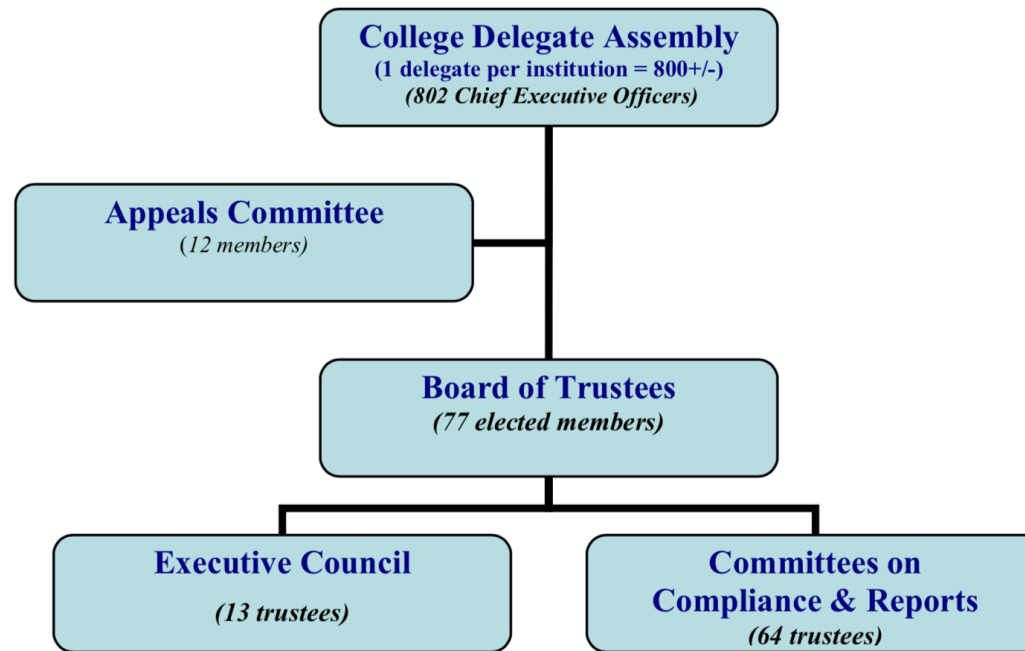
Application of standards in reaching an accrediting decision

- SACSCOC: Three types of standards: core requirements, comprehensive requirements, and federal requirements.
- Vietnam: No such categories. 80% of the total criteria – Pass.

It is suggested that if 80% remain to be an acceptable percentage to be recognized, it is necessary to classify standards into at least two types: **core requirements and comprehensive requirements** in which “core requirements are basic, broad-based, and foundational requirements.

Lesson 6

The involvement of multiple committees





Lesson 6 (Cont'd)

Before being reviewed at the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the review process is conducted at two levels:

- The Off-site Reaffirmation review
- The On-site Reaffirmation review

The current practice at QA agencies in Vietnam is that on-site committee is the only committee who conducts both paper evaluation and on-site evaluation.

Vietnam can form an off-site committee (a different one from onsite team)



Lesson 7

CEA-HCM develops almost a uniform format for the onsite program, including the campus to visit, persons to be interviewed, and classrooms to be visited.

At SACSCOC, each committee organizes its own program during the onsite visit based on the suggested program by SACSCOC, and the focus Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) (one standard in the Principles), which is not reviewed by the off-site committee.





Lesson 8

Discussions across various committees and SACSCOC staff

The role of SACSCOC staff:

- Staff members at the agencies have a limited role
- Some of them are eligible to be peer evaluators





Lesson 9

The selection of committee members

The composition of review committees (8-10):

- Committee Chair
- Governance/Administration
- Academic programs (2-4)
- Financial/Administrative services
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Student Services
- Lead QEP Evaluator (for onsite only)
- Library services

Furthermore, for certain standards, there will be two readers: primary reader and secondary reader to minimize personal bias and experience during the review process



Final thought

QA agencies in Vietnam which have been recently established are definitely in an urgent need of support from other experienced agencies so that they can ensure the credibility and consistency of accreditation decisions.

In its journey to transform and evolve QA system, Vietnam can learn from current practices at SACSCOC as analyzed.