

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS
OF THE COUNCIL ON OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION
ACCREDITATION SELF-STUDY
IN GEORGIA'S TECHNICAL COLLEGES

by

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(Under the Direction of Delmer D. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

This study explored technical college faculty's and administrators' perceptions of the accreditation self-study. The study sought to determine how technical college faculty and administrators perceive the self-study. Second, the study sought to identify and describe areas of common and differing perceptions of the self-study held by college faculty and administrators. Special interest was placed on the personal values underlying these perceptions. Third, the study examined how these perceptions influenced the institutional self-study.

The study was designed as a qualitative multiple case study examining the phenomenon of self-study perceptions at three state technical colleges. The primary method of data collection was interviews with faculty and administrators. Data from the interviews were analyzed first as individual case studies focusing on each institution and then as a cross-case study encompassing all three colleges.

The study found that both faculty and administrators agreed that accreditation enhanced the perceived quality of the institution; that institutional improvement was the primary desirable outcome of the self-study report; and that all members of the institutional community should contribute to the self-study report. However, faculty tended to have a negative view of the self-study process, calling it time-consuming and disruptive. Administrators perceived the process more positively and focused on its beneficial results. The study also showed that administrators often revised the self-study report to reflect their perceptions of the college's operations. Finally, the study found that there were no discernable differences in the values of faculty and administrators, and that the perceptions and values of technical college faculty and administrators did not differ from those of their college and university counterparts.

Rather than draw conclusions about self-study perceptions for all of Georgia's technical colleges, this study determined that each institution operated within its own particular culture and by its own set of values. It is this culture and these values—not job title—that determined perceptions of the self-study process. Where the culture respected and supported divergent opinions and collaboration and where a well-managed and inclusive self-study process was valued, faculty and administrators succeeded in preparing a self-study report that accurately portrayed the institution.

INDEX WORDS: Accreditation, Self-Study, Faculty, Administrator, Perceptions, Values, Council on Occupational Education, Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Institutional Accreditation

One of the primary methods for maintaining standards of education in the United States is accreditation—an external quality review used to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement (Selden & Porter, 1977). Long considered an essential to the survival and growth of the postsecondary educational institution, accreditation has been a requirement for awarding federal financial aid; for establishing criteria for professional certification and licensure in such fields as medicine, education, and law; and for assisting institutions in the determination of acceptability of transfer of credit, which, in turn, makes a school more attractive for potential students (Kells & Parrish, 1986).

Through the accreditation process, an agency or organization evaluates an institution or program of study to determine its level of compliance to certain predetermined qualifications or criteria of operation. In many other countries the establishment and maintenance of educational standards are the responsibilities of a central government bureau. Accreditation in the United States, however, is a private form of self-regulation that has been in place for more than 100 years.

The system of voluntary non-government evaluation that has emerged in the United States has evolved into national and regional approaches to the assessment of educational quality

(Von Alt, 2003). Regional and national accrediting agencies review entire institutions, whereas specialized national accreditors review specific occupational programs such as law, education, social work and allied health. The six regional accrediting organizations operate in distinct geographic areas of the country and review entire institutions, 98 percent or more of which are both degree-granting and nonprofit. National accrediting agencies may operate throughout the country and review entire institutions as well. Of the nationally-accredited institutions, 34.8 percent are degree-granting and 65.2 percent are non-degree-granting. In addition, 20.5 percent are nonprofit and 79.5 percent are for-profit. Many of these are single-purpose institutions that focus on a specific mission or occupation such as nursing, business, or cosmetology. There are approximately 6,300 institutions accredited by 19 regional or national institutional accrediting agencies (CHEA, 2003). Specialized or professional accrediting organizations also operate throughout the country and review programs and some single purpose institutions. There are more than 17,500 of these accredited programs and single purpose institutions (CHEA, 2002).

Since these agencies themselves are recognized by either the United States Department of Education (USDE) or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), accreditation “represents another manifestation of quality control and consumer protection” (Simpson, 2004, p. 81). The USDE’s primary role in the accreditation process is to assure that federal student aid funds are purchasing quality courses and programs. Its recognition is based on ten standards that address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas: student achievement with respect to the institution’s mission; curricula; faculty; facilities and equipment; fiscal and administrative capacity; student support services; recruiting and admissions practices; measures of program length and objectives; student complaints; and compliance with federal student financial aid policies.

CHEA's primary purpose is to assure and strengthen academic quality and improvement through institutional and program adherence to five standards. These standards focus on academic quality; accountability; purposeful change and improvement; fair procedures in decision-making; and the continual reassessment of accreditation practices (CHEA, 2003). Whereas the USDE's processes involving accreditation are governed by federal regulations and law, the CHEA accrediting processes are non-governmental and regulated through policies adopted by its 17-member board of directors. "Recognition" means that the accrediting organizations undergo a periodic review of their qualifications and activities by either the USDE or CHEA to determine whether they continue to meet the appropriate standards. If the accreditors meet these standards, they are considered "recognized."

The Council on Occupational Education

The Council on Occupational Education (COE) is an example of a national accrediting agency recognized by the USDE and that accredits four types of institutions: state-regulated technical and vocational colleges, proprietary postsecondary schools, Department of Defense training installations, and Job Corps Centers managed by the U.S. Department of Labor. Originating in 1971 as the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), one of the nation's six regional accrediting agencies, it provided accreditation services to postsecondary occupational education institutions located in the eleven-state region served by SACS. The Council became an independent entity in 1994 when it was incorporated as a non-profit education organization under the laws of the State of Georgia. At the end of June 1995, COE became a fully operational agency when it was officially recognized by the USDE, at which time the membership of COEI was transferred from SACS to COE (COE, 2004a). The Commission of the Council on

Occupational Education is composed of 20 members who function as the governing board and decision-making body for all accreditation actions of the Council. COE currently accredits approximately 430 institutions (COE, 2003). Due to the agency's original association with SACS, a majority of these institutions are located in the southern part of the United States. Included in the COE list of accredited institutions are 27 of the 34 technical colleges operating in the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education system.

The Accreditation Process

The process of seeking, receiving, and maintaining accreditation is similar in all the regional, national, and specialized agencies recognized by both the USDE and CHEA. First, an institution applies for candidacy or pre-accreditation status after meeting certain eligibility requirements specific to the accrediting agency. These requirements may include holding state or federal licensure, meeting minimum financial stability benchmarks, and enrolling students for a minimum period of time. After being awarded candidate status by a commission or board of directors of the accrediting agency, the institution prepares a written self-study describing how its programs and services meet the conditions, policies, and operating criteria expressed in the accrediting agency's standards. This document is reviewed by the agency and serves as the basis for evaluation by a visiting team representing the accrediting commission. During the site visit a team of volunteer educators observes, first-hand, the school's operations and determines if the institution's programs, services, and practices are consistent with the standards of the accrediting agency. The team prepares an evaluation report and submits it to the commission or review body of the accrediting agency. The institution also receives a copy of the team report and has the opportunity to respond to its findings. The accrediting commission or review body considers the self-study, the team report, and the institution's response in making a decision to award or deny

accredited status to the school. Negative actions on the part of the accrediting commission may be appealed according to the agency's established procedures.

Once the accredited status has been awarded, the institution maintains its accreditation by undergoing periodic review involving further self-study reports and team visits. While the renewal of accreditation generally occurs each year through an annual report submitted to the accrediting agency by the school, new self-study and reaffirmation team visit cycles of between two and ten years are determined by the accrediting agency upon the initial accreditation of the institution. "In this way, accrediting bodies hold their member institutions and programs continually responsible to their educational peers, to the constituents they serve, and to the public" (Von Alt, 2003, p. 678).

The Self-Study

In their eight-year research project involving over 700 postsecondary institutions in the northeast United States, Kells and Kirkwood (1979) found that the institutional self-study was the single most significant component of the accreditation process. In its most basic form, the accreditation self-study is a narrative analysis describing the degree to which an institution adheres to the operating standards and criteria required by the accrediting organization for the school's programs and services (Kells, 1995). Each accrediting agency has its own requirements for the organization, format, and content of the institutional self-study report. The Council on Occupational Education, for example, specifically outlines the different components that are to comprise the self-study report, from cover page specifications to the glossary that discloses abbreviations and terms germane to the institution. The bulk of the self-study document includes reports on each of the agency's ten standards, from institutional mission to student services and activities, and on the individual occupational programs offered by the school. COE recommends

that each of these reports contain four parts: an introduction; an analysis of the program or service's compliance with accreditation standards; a discussion of challenges and proposed solutions for any areas of non-compliance; and a summary that encapsulates the findings in the report.

All six regional accrediting agencies which serve 95 percent of the nonprofit educational institutions have traditionally required that a self-study document be prepared as a prerequisite for initial or continued accreditation. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education states in its accreditation guide that "the self-study that each college or university conducts is the most important and valuable aspect of the accrediting process" (p. 3). The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, likewise, contends that "the institutional self-study is the most significant part of the accreditation process" (p. 15). Similarly, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges states that the heart of the institutional evaluation process is "the conducting of a rigorous self study during which an institution appraises itself in terms of the Commission's Standards" (p. 2).

Of particular importance in the preparation of a self-study report is the collaboration of the different sectors of the institution. This requirement is explicitly stated in a number of the accrediting organizations' self-study manuals. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education states in its *Designs for Excellence: Handbook for Institutional Self-Study (2002)* that "a cross section of the campus community is expected to participate in the self-study process at each stage: in the steering committee, the working groups, and the campus-wide discussions" (p. 2). In its *Self-Study Manual*, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges requires "the inclusion of all constituencies of the college [to insure] that the self-study does not reflect the exclusive view of any one group"

(p. 3). The Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training requires that its Analytic Self-Evaluation Report be “a team effort requiring a high level of commitment, input, and interaction across a broad cross-section of staff” (ACCET, 2002, p. 2). This cooperative effort is intended to result in a self-study document that is an accurate and honest reflection of the school’s operation as perceived by those individuals who are most familiar with its programs and services. Marti (1993) observed that “the strength of a self-study report lies in its ability to accurately represent institutional commitment to the college’s mission and goals” (p. 68).

The Problem

Accreditation is Questioned

Non-governmental accreditation has not been without its share of controversy and detractors (Palinchak, 1993; Simmons, 1993). Since the 1960’s accreditation has increased in importance and has experienced closer scrutiny as demands for institutional effectiveness, accountability, and coordinated study and planning processes have accompanied the growing competition, economic constraints, and political pressures that institutions now face (Kells, 1983). Furthermore, the impartiality of the co-dependent relationship between accrediting agencies and the institutions they accredit has been questioned (Gaul, 2005).

Because it is so important, much research has been done on the origins, the development and the politics of institutional accreditation. However, the institutional self-study, considered by many to be the capstone of the accreditation process (Young, 1983; Marcus, 1984; Kells, 1995), has received less attention from the academic research community. This is largely due to the fact that the execution of the self-study has been shown to be widely diverse (Kells & Kirkwood, 1979), mostly as a result of variances in governance and operating procedures among institutions (El-Khawas, 1983). Weick (1979, p. 29) described institutions of higher education as “loosely

coupled organizations” whose operational units possess “few strong variables in common.”

Therefore, the collaborative nature of the self-study is a special challenge in colleges and universities where, customarily, interdepartmental cooperative initiatives are rare (Kells, 1995; Alstete, 2004).

A Divide of Culture and Experience

The University of Vermont, for example, found that their self-study efforts were plagued by “a divide of culture and experience” that existed between members of the faculty and members of the school’s administration (Martin, Manning & Ramaley, 2001, p. 96).

Faculty often view administrators as bureaucratic, unscholarly, business-minded, impatient with faculty concerns, and insensitive to academic values. For their part, administrators see faculty as conservative, suspicious of the administration, reluctant to change, unwilling to contribute to the daily operations of the institution, and, in some cases, cynical about whether any change is either possible or desirable.

The views discovered by Martin, Manning, and Ramalay in Vermont were recently echoed in letters to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* where one writer commented on “the polarization between administrators and faculty members, while both groups are supposedly working toward the same goal of educating young minds” (Talreja, 2005, p. A47). The professor from Texas A&M University went on to describe “the mistrust and low view of faculty members expressed in [a recent] article appear to be a reaction to the same feelings directed at administrators by some faculty members” (p. A47).

The findings discovered at the University of Vermont are not altogether surprising to many educators who recognize that academic review—the foundation of the self-study—is, in essence, a political process (Kells, 1995). Birnbaum (1989) agreed, largely because he found that administrative and faculty cultures are built on incompatible decision-making models and

organizational structures. The difference in these cultures generates a set of divergent perspectives that influence an educational institution's day-to-day operations (Clark, 1989).

Anecdotal Evidence of this Divide

For the past seven years I have presented a four-hour workshop called "How to Prepare the Institutional Self-Study" for the Council on Occupational Education. The workshop is held twice a year, and each session is attended by roughly 250 educators whose institutions are in the process of preparing the self-study report required in the COE accreditation process. During the course of these workshops I have had many conversations with both faculty members and administrators about their institutions' self-study processes. I have learned that some faculty members view the self-study document as an opportunity to describe accurately their programs and institutions and show how their school meets or does not meet COE requirements in the areas of instructional support and learning resources. It is widely believed by these instructors that this honest and forthright approach may result in improvements and increased resources to support their programs. These improvements, their argument goes, would be implemented by the administration before publication of the self-study report, which would then be revised to show that the school is now in compliance with COE requirements. If the administration does not act on the published shortcomings, the argument continues, the visiting accreditation team may issue the school a recommendation that it upgrade program equipment or instructional resources in order to be in compliance with accreditation standards. Other faculty members, however, are skeptical of the self-study process, feeling that regardless of their contribution to the self-study report, the administration will white-wash the final document to show that the school is in complete compliance with the accreditation standards.

The attitude shared by many instructors attending the self-study workshops differs from that of many administrators who usually inform me that they are looking forward to doing the self-study so that they can publicize how well their schools are complying with COE requirements. These administrators often speak of innovations their institutions have implemented, and they look forward to highlighting exceptional programs at their schools.

Over the years it has struck me that these two groups of educators—often from the same school—are miles apart in their perceptions and expectations of the institutional self-study. I have often wondered if these apparent differences in perception are widespread and if they have any effect on the self-study report. Preparing the self-study is intended to be a process whereby institutions may discover areas of deficiency, address them, and by doing so improve the educational programs and services offered by the school. I began to question whether faculty members were using the self-study merely as an opportunity to increase their instructional resources, or whether administrators were purposefully shaping the self-study in order to illustrate complete compliance with COE standards. I also questioned whether some instructors intentionally omitted any compliance problems in their program areas, resigned to the belief that administration would ultimately white-wash the final report in order to eliminate any potential obstacles to accreditation. Finally, I wondered whether these perceptions of the self-study resulted in a document which gives a false impression of the institution's level of compliance with accreditation standards. As a member of the accreditation community, I see these questions as significant. Yet in spite of all the literature devoted to accreditation issues, there seems to be little research on the accreditation process focusing on the different perceptions toward the self-study held by the school faculty and by members of its administration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of the COE accreditation self-study held by faculty and administrators in Georgia's technical colleges, as well as to examine the influence these perceptions may have on the institutional self-study report. First, the study sought to determine how faculty and administrators perceive the COE accreditation self-study in three individual case studies from three technical colleges in the state of Georgia. The second purpose of the study sought to identify and describe areas of common and differing perceptions of the self-study held by the technical college faculty and administrators. Special interest was placed on examining the personal values underlying these perceptions. The final purpose of the study was to examine how these different perceptions may influence the institution's self-study report. The results of this research may have implications for both accrediting agencies and accredited institutions.

Research Questions

This study examined the perceptions of the accreditation self-study held by faculty and administrators at three technical colleges in Georgia. The questions used to guide the research were:

1. Are there differences in how instructors and school administrators perceive the institutional self-study?
2. What are the defining characteristics of these perceptions?
3. What are the personal values underlying these perceptions?
4. How is the content of the institutional self-study influenced by these perceptions?

Theoretical Framework

This discussion of self-study perceptions by members of a school's faculty or administration was grounded in the disciplines of organizational development. Effective assessment depends on the fact that "clarity and agreement on organizational mission are usually considered a fundamental principle for establishing systems of accountability" (Birnbaum, 1991, p. 87). Common ground must be created in order to bring together and use the talents and energies of a school's multiple cultures to promote meaningful, mission-related institutional change (Martin, Manning & Ramaley, 2001). As noted above, two significant cultures found within an institution—its faculty and its administration—are often at odds over issues of policy, procedure, and practice. The occasion of the self-study may serve as a flashpoint for eliciting strong differences of opinion between members of these two groups. Exacerbating these differences are such institutional barriers as complex operational goals, complicated and shared governance patterns, scarcity of information about goal achievement, and a general lack of data needed for the self-study process (Kells, 1983). Added to this are the facts that faculty and administrators frequently hold different views toward accreditation and most often work better as individuals than they do in the teams that accrediting agencies recommend (El-Khawas, 1983).

As a theoretical concept based on a shared set of beliefs and values held by the members of a business entity, organizational development research is grounded in the study of Abraham Maslov's Needs Hierarchy and in the Theory X and Theory Y management traditions (Hultman & Gellermann, 2002). Conflict between the needs/values of management and those of an organization's workers provides ample fodder for the development of a range of organizational behavior models. Trice and Beyer (1993) see the relationship between management and employees as a function of how well each segment controls work activities within the

organization. Conflict results when the achievement of organizational goals is jeopardized by differences in the way that each group thinks that work should be done.

Members of an occupation usually feel they need discretion to use their work-related expertise appropriately; members of management feel they must exercise some measure of control to ensure efficiency and prevent opportunism. Each sees work-related issues from the framework provided by their own experiences and ideologies (Trice & Beyer, p. 186)

Differences in ideologies, values and perceptions held by management and employees often result in the dysfunctional conflict that hampers the achievement of organizational goals (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1997). “As standards of importance, values are crucial cultural components because they’re the criteria used to make decisions, set priorities, and develop strategies” (Hultman & Gellerman, 2002, p. 80). This is no less true in the education arena where “all meanings which are assigned to any educational policy, practice or program are relative to the values of the person who is intending the meaning” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 161). The Motivational System Model developed by Hultman and Gellermann (2002) describes a series of activities that occurs when individuals and organizations are responding to perceived needs and wants. The Motivational System Model describes how all of our work activities begin with perceived needs and wants, progress through processes of thinking and feeling, and then valuing and deciding before action is taken to satisfy the need. One of the critical factors in this model is “value alignment” or “the degree to which compatibility exists among an individual’s values, or among the values of individuals, teams, and the overall organization” (p. 15). In an organization where the values of workers and leaders are not aligned, decisions may be made that could interfere with the successful achievement of organizational goals. Using the example of perceptions of the institutional self-study, if faculty values are not aligned with administration’s values the resulting self-study report may not be an accurate depiction of the programs and

services offered by an institution. This, in turn, may jeopardize the desired benefits of the self-study process.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical in nature. A better understanding of the way faculty and administrators perceive institutional accreditation and the self-study process may provide a theoretical basis for the planning, design, and application of self-study processes from the perspective of both individual institutions and their accrediting agencies.

The value of national or regional accreditation is generally acknowledged by today's postsecondary institutions (Deighton, 1971; Anderson & Murphy, 1975; Kells & Kirkwood, 1979), and the self-study is widely perceived as the predominant component of this process (Kells, 1980; Chambers, 1983). However, Clark (1989) argues that the complexity of today's multidimensional educational institution may jeopardize the sense of common values and shared purpose essential to the organization's success. Nowhere would these disparities of values or purpose become more apparent than in the preparation of the institution's self-study document. However, Martin, Manning and Ramaley (2001) believe that the preparation of the institutional self-study can present a significant occasion for creating "new patterns of thought" and new behavior by faculty and administrators that may lead to both clarity and agreement about the mission of an institution. (p. 113). This research study may be significant in revealing the extent to which core occupational values and perceptions of the self-study vary between faculty and administrators and if these variances influence the self-study report. In identifying general categories of perception this present study may also provide a context within which the accreditation self-study can be re-examined, modified and adapted to remain a viable and

objective document of institutional assessment. With increasing attention and rising costs associated with institutional accreditation (Greenberg, 2001), it would be in a school's best interest to assure that the self-study effort yields positive results.

The practical significance of this study is three-fold. First, it provides a lens through which the technical college accreditation self-study may be critically examined and objectively analyzed. Secondly, its conclusions may encourage institutions to reconsider the means by which their faculty and administrators are oriented and trained for the task of not only preparing the self-study, but also for engaging in any collaborative initiative that crosses disciplinary or departmental boundaries. Finally, this study may persuade accrediting agencies such as the Council on Occupational Education to re-assess the pivotal role of the self-study in the institutional accreditation process. Recently the SACS Commission on Colleges made a watershed change in its accreditation practices by discontinuing the institutional self-study altogether and substituting the Quality Enhancement Plan as a requirement for accreditation. In explaining this significant policy decision, SACS Associate Executive Director A. Chard stated that many educators feel "that the traditional self-study had become somewhat less than analytical and [that] many institutions did not use it properly for improvement purposes" (personal communication, September 1, 2004). Kells (1995), too, found that numerous contextual factors may ultimately influence one's intentions in the preparation of the self-study. This present study aimed to reveal the degree to which conflicting values and perceptions may depreciate the objectivity of the institutional self-study, thereby jeopardizing what many agencies believe to be the integral component of the accreditation process.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are essential to an examination of perceptions of the institutional self-study process.

Accreditation refers to the process by which an agency or organization evaluates and recognizes an institution or program of study as meeting certain predetermined qualifications or standards, and issues a public statement to this effect. Although some governmental agencies, such as the Regents of the State of New York, perform certain accrediting or certifying functions, the bulk of accreditation is performed by voluntary educational associations, and it is accreditation by these organizations which is addressed in this study (Selden & Porter, 1977).

Regional accreditation refers to institutional accreditation by one of six quasi-autonomous separate commissions with their own standards, bylaws, and rules of operation. Each commission operates within a specified geographic region. These six agencies are the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Palinchak, 1993).

National accreditation refers to institutional accreditation by agencies that operate throughout the country and review entire institutions. These include degree and non-degree granting institutions and single-purpose institutions focusing on, for example, business and information technology (CHEA, 2002).

Specialized accreditation is done by accreditors who operate throughout the country and review programs and some single-purpose institutions. There are currently more than 17,600 of these accredited programs and single-purpose operations (CHEA, 2002).

The *institutional self-study* is a comprehensive document which describes a school's programs and services with respect to the standards of operation required by the school's accrediting agency. The purpose of the self-study is to demonstrate the institution's level of compliance with these standards (Kells, 1995).

Faculty is the personnel employed by an educational institution responsible for classroom or lab instruction of students or for academic research. "As arbiters of the curriculum, the faculty transmit concepts and ideas, decide on course content and level, select textbooks, prepare and evaluate examinations, and generally structure learning conditions for the student" (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 73).

Administration in the context of this study refers to the *administrators* in the postsecondary education establishment who are responsible for the management of the institution. In a line-staff organizational structure where the faculty represents the "line", or that level of personnel directly involved with serving the student/client, the administration performs the staff functions dealing with human resources management, budgeting, intra-institutional administration, legal issues, public relations, and liaison with state and federal agencies. Members of the administration include the president, or chief executive officer, vice presidents, deans, directors, and other supervisory personnel (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Perception refers to an individual's "quick, acute and intuitive cognition" of an event or phenomenon (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975). In this study it refers to a person's feelings or predisposition relating to issues surrounding the self-study as a part of the institutional accreditation process.

Values used in this study in a psychological sense are "conceptions about what's important in life" that, once embraced, "become part of our identity as a person" (Hultman &

Gellermann,2002, p. 44). Within the realm of education, “judgments of good and bad, right and wrong, efficient and inefficient, appropriate and inappropriate are based on the values, aims and beliefs of the entire educational constituency” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 155).

Organization of the Document

As an aid to the reader, this section provides an overview of the organization of this research document. Chapter One has outlined the research context and problem statement, the purpose of the study, the basic research questions, the theoretical concepts in which the study is framed, the significance of the study, and the definition of key terms. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature pertinent to the research problem. Chapter Three presents the rationale for the methodological approach selected for this study and outlines the details of sampling, data collection and data analysis. Chapter Three ends with a review of the methodological limitations and researcher bias that may have influenced the study. The research results are presented in Chapter Four. A summary of the study is found in Chapter Five, along with implications and recommendations drawn from the study. Chapter Five ends with suggestions for future research. Finally, two appendices provide an outline of the interview protocol used during data collection and copies of documents issued to interview participants.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In conducting research for the topic of faculty and administrator perceptions of the Council on Occupational Education (COE) self-study in Georgia's technical colleges, I concentrated on two broad areas of reading: institutional accreditation and the accreditation self-study. I found a vast quantity of literature dealing with accreditation practices, types of accreditation, the effectiveness of accreditation, problems in accreditation, and legal challenges confronting accreditation, just to name a few research categories. The review of the literature for this study focused on the historical development of institutional accreditation, criticisms of accreditation practices, and current challenges facing accreditation in higher education. The purpose of this initial part of the review is to provide the reader with a historic and social context of the accreditation practices currently in place among Georgia's technical colleges and COE.

The second portion of this chapter features a review of the literature concerning the self-study as the centerpiece of institutional accreditation. Contrary to the vast amount of research available on the topic of institutional accreditation, I found very little scholarly research devoted to an examination of the accreditation self-study. In addition to providing a background on the development of the self-study report, this section of the literature review includes a brief overview of desirable features for a successful self-study followed by a discussion of problems faced by many institutions in carrying out an effective self-study process. The challenges presented here are similar to those faced by Georgia's technical colleges.

Finally, there is a review of the few previous doctoral dissertations that have focused on perceptions of the accreditation process by various members of the education community.

A Historical Perspective of Accreditation

Origins of Institutional Review

Since education was not included among the powers delegated to the federal government in the Constitution of the United States, all matters involving education have been traditionally reserved to each of the states or to the voluntary sector representing particular professional interests (Palinchak, 1993). This lack of a federal authority over education contributed to the fractional and sporadic development of often inconsistent standards applied to a variety of educational institutions. In 1784, the state of New York established one of the first precursors to accreditation: the Regents of the University of the State of New York, a corporate body designed to “charter, endow and control” higher education institutions as well as elementary and secondary schools, museums, and libraries in the state (Harclerod, 1983, p. 42). The Regents paid periodic visits to the institutions operating under their charter, required regular reports from these institutions, and, in turn, reported regularly to the state legislature on the status of these institutions (Selden & Porter, 1977). Gradually the New York model of state supervision of educational quality spread to other regions of the country.

Not all states, however, were disposed to follow New York’s example in establishing agencies to monitor education, and few among them had formal licensing systems designed to safeguard the integrity of professional practice (Bender, 1983). As a result, professional associations such as the American Medical Association were formed to combat fraud and inadequate educational programs that threatened to jeopardize the integrity of the nation’s developing medical profession. Soon many other professional associations, from architecture to veterinary medicine, voluntarily began to review the professional programs taught in schools and colleges across the country. The purpose of this review was primarily to ensure that students

would be exposed to the kinds of training and learning experiences that were prerequisites for professional practice. These reviews were conducted by volunteers within the profession who participated in evaluation teams that visited professional programs taught in various institutions. The teams submitted an evaluation report to a governing board or commission that ultimately made accrediting decisions based on established standards of the profession.

Early Standards and Practices

The establishment of the United States Department of Education in 1867 started a movement to standardize education on a nationwide basis. One of the first functions of the new department was to collect facts about the country's growing number of educational institutions. This effort began by the department's defining "college" as "any institution granting degrees and having students in attendance" (Kelley & Wilbur, 1970, p. 26). This was the first step in defining and eventually setting standards for colleges.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, while the U.S. government was attempting to codify the country's educational landscape, there was a growing concern about the unevenness of quality in high school and college education. This concern gave rise to the same interest in voluntary educational accreditation that had been developed and refined by various professional groups a generation earlier. "When the need became clear for stronger admission standards and institutional evaluation of the rapidly expanding secondary schools and colleges in the 1870s and 1880s, the logical solution for educational institutions was to establish new, voluntary membership associations" (Harclerod, 1983, p. 43). The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools was established in 1885 for the purpose of providing a forum for secondary school personnel to discuss such problems as curriculum and admissions practices with leaders of the region's colleges (West, 1978). Shortly thereafter, in 1887, the Middle States

Association of Colleges and Schools was developed. Both the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States followed in 1895 (Harcleroad, 1983).

The regional associations “did not develop cooperatively with any plan in mind for a rational organization to serve institutional accreditation” (Bemis, 1983, p. 177). The different regions—by 1962 there were six—grew and evolved at random without much attention to the size of the region or the number of schools located therein. Consequently, there is no consistency in the size of the six agencies; for example, the North Central Association serves nineteen states while the Western Association serves only two. In the 1970s there were several attempts to realign the state membership in the Western, Northwest, and North Central Associations. However, the member institutions representing these associations were not able to come to agreement on realignment plans.

Although educational accreditation had its beginnings in state, regional and professional agencies in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it did not become a national phenomenon until 1906 when a committee of the National Association of State Universities convened in Williamstown, MA, “to present a plan...for establishing, preserving, and interpreting in common terms the standards of admission to college, whatever be the method or combination of methods of admission, in order to accommodate migrating students and to secure just understanding and administration of standards” (Conference Minutes, 1906, as reported by Young, 1983, p.2). Attending the meeting were representatives of the four existing regional associations as well as the six-year old College Entrance Examination Board. The meeting participants agreed to the following: recommend that the regional associations have their member colleges accept certificates from accredited schools in other regions; encourage the

regional associations not yet doing so to organize a college commission for accrediting schools; propose the development of common definitions and standards; and establish a permanent commission “for the purpose of considering, from time to time, entrance requirements and matters of mutual interest to colleges and preparatory schools” (Young, 1983, p.3).

The last recommendation cited above resulted in the formation of the National Conference Committee of the Associations of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in 1907. This committee met annually for seventeen years. Out of these meetings came such significant advances as recommended definitions for educational institutions (including the Carnegie Unit), the modern-day admissions testing program of the College Entrance Examination Board, and the sanctioning and eventual nationalizing of accreditation, first at the secondary school level and then for colleges and universities, through the expansion and linking of regional accrediting associations.

The Beginning of Institutional Accreditation

The four regional associations initially were created “to develop and maintain a method of articulation” (Selden & Porter, 1977, p. 2) between the regions’ secondary schools and colleges, and to establish open communication between institutions primarily for defining admissions policies and practices (Shaw, 1993). Accreditation, as it is known today, was not a formal pursuit of these associations (Bemis, 1983). It was not long, however, until the associations realized that these informal articulation procedures did not meet the needs of all their members. Specifically, it was soon apparent that some institutions within a region were better equipped to prepare students for college admission and professional preparation than others. Much of this disparity in educational quality was the result of the lack of common standards among institutions, especially among those calling themselves colleges or universities.

It then became incumbent on the regional associations to develop a method for protecting their member institutions from competition by other schools considered to be deficient, inadequate, or unethical. This method evolved into institutional accreditation, the practice by which institutions were obligated to meet certain requirements for membership in the association. The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools began to accredit high schools in 1905 and then decided to accredit member colleges. Standards were drawn up in 1909, procedures were set in motion in 1910, and by 1913 the association presented its first list of accredited institutions (Pfnister, 1959). This activity represents the first accreditation of institutions of higher education in the United States (Selden & Porter, 1977). All the regional associations eventually would require institutions seeking membership to be inspected and to meet certain established standards (Bloland, 2001). Meeting these standards resulted in accreditation of the institution which, in turn, qualified it for membership. Although the North Central, Middle States and Southern Association had adopted college accreditation by the early part of the 20th century, the oldest regional association, the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, did not adopt college accreditation as a function until 1952 (Bemis, 1983).

The early beginnings of accreditation were grounded in the twin concerns of identity and articulation (Young, 1983). Specifically, the regional and professional associations were responsible for identifying which institutions were to be classified as preparatory schools, high schools, colleges, or medical schools, and for specifying what courses of study would prepare students for admission to the next level of education. However, with the development and proliferation of the practice of accrediting colleges, it became necessary for the regional associations to establish requirements for membership. “These early efforts understandably concerned themselves with minimum standards and defined those standards in specific,

quantitative terms that were generally acceptable at the time” (Young, 1983, p. 6). Initially the standards adopted for the purposes of accreditation were “quite specific and arbitrary” and “did not provide much leeway for institutional differences” (Bemis, 1983, p. 169). But in 1921 the American Council on Education developed operational standards for four-year colleges, junior colleges, and teacher training schools that exercised considerable influence on the regional associations. Although the formats of these standards were similar, there were differences in content for these three types of institutions.

College accreditation was further refined in 1936 when the North Central Association adopted the principle that an institution would be evaluated in terms of its own purposes and not by arbitrary standards. This move resulted from a study of fifty-seven institutions accredited by North Central. Prepared by the Committee on Revision of Standards, the study report recommended that “an institution will be judged for [accreditation] upon the basis of the total pattern it presents as an institution of higher education....It is recognized that wide variations will appear [and that] the facilities and activities of an institution will be judged in terms of the purposes it seeks to serve” (Zook & Haggerty, 1936, p. 98). Gradually other accrediting associations also adopted this principle which led to the establishment of what became known as the self-study process.

The Rise of Specialized Accrediting Associations

By the 1960s the original four regional accrediting agencies had been joined by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (1917) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (1962) to form the six regional agencies active today. Adding to the accreditation landscape were specialized accrediting agencies, also referred to as professional or programmatic accreditors. As mentioned above, the American Medical Association was a pioneer in specialized

or programmatic accreditation in its attempts to regulate early medical instruction. The establishment of the Association of American Medical Colleges in 1890 and later the Council on Medical Education (1904) were efforts by the profession to create ideal standards for education in the field (Hamm, 1997). Similarly, the Association of American Law Schools, formed in 1900, adopted standards for membership that dealt with the quality of legal education. Early efforts to address the problems of educational quality in the professions of medicine and law set a pattern of review that would be followed by agencies representing a wide variety of professional interests. This pattern included the establishment of educational guidelines or standards, on-site visits to the educational institution, and the publication of a list of institutions meeting the agency's requirements. By the end of the 1920s there were agencies in dentistry, landscape architecture, library science, music, nursing, optometry, teacher education, and collegiate business education. By 1952 the National Commission on Accrediting recognized twenty-two specialized accrediting bodies (Glidden, 1983). The 2002-2003 *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education*, published by the American Council on Education, listed forty-nine specialized and programmatic accrediting bodies (Von Alt, 2003).

While the specialized or programmatic accrediting bodies generally review and accredit individual programs taught in institutions offering a multitude of program options, national accrediting bodies, like their regional counterparts, offer comprehensive accreditation and accredit the entire institution. There are two major categories of national accrediting organizations: associations whose members are predominantly proprietary schools and associations whose members are predominantly church-related schools (Young, 1983). Among the former organizations are those whose institutions have similar missions and education objectives such as occupational or vocational training, and consequently these associations

reflect the interests and concerns of a majority of their members. Examples of these latter associations include the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools and the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools. The American Council on Education listed twenty-seven national institutional accrediting bodies in 2003 (Von Alt, 2003).

Federal Recognition of Accrediting Organizations

The last half of the 20th century saw many changes in America's educational landscape. There was a significant increase in the number of postsecondary education students following World War II as beneficiaries of the Servicemen's Readjustment Acts (or "GI Bill") flocked to local colleges, universities and professional schools. Not only did this considerable rise in enrollment spark a period of growth for the country's postsecondary institutions, it also placed renewed emphasis on the importance of institutional accreditation, especially in the vocational education sector. "Some twenty times the anticipated number of veterans actually pursued education, a majority of them seeking vocational training below the college level" (Chambers, 1983, p. 239). At the time there was a shortage of established and reputable technical schools, and during a five-year period the number of such schools tripled (Chambers, 1983). Amidst reports of fly-by-night vocational schools taking advantage of thousands of former GIs, Congress sought to assure the quality of instruction for recipients of the GI Bill benefits, and it turned to the states and asked each of them to conduct an approval process for their postsecondary educational institutions. Congress indicated that the states' efforts were to be supported by the Office of Education (OE) which was, in turn, directed to publish a list of "nationally recognized" accrediting bodies that could be considered reliable in judging the educational quality of the states' member institutions. Therefore, in 1952 the Office of Education released a list of accrediting bodies contained in its directory, *Accredited Higher Institutions*. Publishing this list

represented a milestone for accreditation for two reasons: (1) the federal government had never previously purported to make an explicit statement about who was an accrediting body, and (2) accrediting bodies were now, by virtue of the statutory provision, judged to be both “recognized” and “reliable.”

Accreditation and NDEA Funding

In response to the Sputnik launch, Congress passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in an effort to encourage young Americans to pursue higher education so that the country could remain competitive in the emerging technological age. Of particular importance for the country’s education institutions was the fact that the act inaugurated a new link between accreditation and federal funding eligibility that has continued, virtually unchanged, to this day. Unlike the GI Bill of earlier years, the NDEA gave the Office of Education direct responsibility for administering federal financial aid to students and the institutions they attend. Congress determined that these funds could be used only at institutions of higher education that were public or nonprofit, authorized by the states in which they were located, and accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body. As happened after the passage of GI Bill with its requirement that approved institutions be “nationally recognized,” there was an intensified desire for institutions to be accredited as a result of the National Defense Education Act, especially among the growing number of trade and vocational schools.

Accreditation and the Higher Education Act

President Johnson’s comprehensive Great Society initiative passed in 1968 included an education component called the Higher Education Act (HEA). “The Great Society programs were based on the premises of opportunity for all and independence of choice” (Chambers, 1983, p. 250). The Higher Education Act and a supplement called the Vocational Student Loan

Insurance Act enabled needy students to attend not only colleges and universities, but also community colleges and proprietary training centers to pursue vocational and technical studies. As a result, more institutions enrolled students in occupational programs following passage of the HEA than had served veterans twenty years earlier (Chambers, 1983). Again, the vital link between student funding and institutional eligibility was institutional accreditation by a “recognized” accrediting body. Now, however, proprietary schools could also benefit from students enrolled with guaranteed government loans.

To respond to the increasing significance of occupational education, the regional accrediting bodies broadened their memberships to include the rapidly growing community college and vocational school sectors. The regional associations added new divisions, or commissions, that addressed the needs of these new constituents in the education community. In 1968, for example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools created the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions for postsecondary non-degree-granting schools (Bemis, 1983). The new commission began accrediting occupational institutions in 1971. For the most part, these new commissions utilized practices of developing standards and exercising peer review that were identical to those that had proved so successful in the parent association’s accrediting processes for higher education institutions.

A New Requirement for Federal Recognition

Due to the vital link between accreditation and federal funds eligibility that had developed since the enactment of the GI Bill, the federal government found itself increasingly petitioned by new accrediting agencies to be included on the Office of Education’s *Accredited Higher Institutions* list (Chambers, 1983). In addition, existing accrediting associations were asking the OE to safeguard the right of the long-standing and, by implication, legitimate

accrediting groups to remain on this list (Proffitt, 1968). “In a fundamental turnabout, the Office of Education now saw itself as a guardian and protector of the rights of recognized accrediting bodies” (Chambers, 1983 p. 255). Since the Office of Education was now providing a service for the accrediting community, it could demand, in turn, that the accrediting bodies demonstrate that they were worthy of being on the list of approved agencies. In 1969 the OE published guidelines in the *Federal Register* outlining good practices for accrediting agencies to follow if they wanted to become or remain “recognized” by the department. These included requirements that the accrediting body ensure the following: due process for member institutions, the regular review of standards for accreditation, fiscal soundness, and defining its various accrediting statuses. Although there have been several legislative challenges to the accreditation-eligibility link during Congressional debates for the scheduled reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act, the fundamental principle of federal recognition of institutional accreditation as a requirement of education funding has yet to be altered (Dill & Massy, 1996; Alstete, 2004).

COPA and CHEA

In 1995 the President’s Work Group on Accreditation recommended the formation of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a board designed to recognize and coordinate accrediting bodies (Dill & Massy, 1996). CHEA was intended to be a successor agency to the ill-fated Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), which was chartered in 1974 and assumed the enormous responsibility of coordinating the accrediting bodies and processes encompassing of all the nation’s postsecondary educational entities (Chambers, 1983). However, the purpose, scope, authority and membership of COPA were regularly contested (Bloland, 2001). Not surprisingly, COPA was dissolved in 1993, due in large part to continuing disagreements among its member associations (Dill & Massy, 1996). Representing sixty

national, regional and specialized accreditors, CHEA's membership is comprised only of those regional and national accrediting agencies with at least 50 percent of their member schools designated as postsecondary degree-granting institutions (CHEA, 2002). With over three thousand member institutions, today CHEA "represents the largest institutionally based membership organization in higher education" (Simpson, 2004, p. 81). In addition to coordinating its members' accreditation activities, this private, nonprofit, national organization directs its accrediting agencies to employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision making and to reassess continually their accrediting practices (Alstete, 2004). Although it has been criticized as offering less than rigorous oversight to accreditation standards (Amaral, 1998), CHEA nonetheless enjoys a status equal to the Secretary of Education in its official recognition of accrediting bodies.

Criticisms of Accreditation

Institutional accreditation has not been without its detractors. From the early years of the 20th century when institutional accreditation was making its presence felt on campuses across the country there have been critics who have challenged the purpose and practices of the accreditation process. One of the earliest critics was Samuel Capen, Chancellor of the University of Buffalo who said, "Responsible administrators of influential institutions in various parts of the country are tired of having the educational and financial policies of their institutions dictated by a horde of irresponsible outsiders, each representing a separate selfish interest" (Capen, 1939, p. 5). Other critics have referred to accreditation as "an elusive, nebulous, jellyfish term that means different things to the same people" (Pinkham, 1952, p. 47); as "a process inevitably driven by judgments which are essentially transient in their validity" (Wriston, 1960, p. 320); and as a

process where “among accreditors there is no agreement about the meaning of a college education” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1982, p. 76).

Some critics of accreditation may be less harsh than those listed above but still feel that it often leads to a “culture of compliance” in which time and resources that should be focused on educational improvement are “dissipated in gathering information, providing mandated reports, and [sometimes] staging presentations designed to mislead external viewers” (Dill & Massy, 1996, p. 22). This sentiment was presaged by Wriston (1960) and by Doerr (1983), the latter of whom went so far as to say that “if accreditation isn’t slowed as a phenomenon, institutions of higher education may well declare that process is our most important product” (p. 8). Graham, Lyman and Trow (1995) followed this argument to the logical conclusion that the accreditation function is basically incompatible with an institution’s own internal assessment and improvement processes. They stated that the accreditation process invariably leads to the publication of a self-study document that tends to overstate the institution’s strengths and conceal its weaknesses, which is the opposite of what is needed if the institution is to be well served by the accreditation process (Harvey, 2004).

Other criticisms of accreditation focus on the cost incurred by the process, as well as on the lack of in-depth evaluation by many institutions involved. Added to this are charges of unfair standards and the perception that accreditation is primarily self-serving to the agencies dictating the processes (Marchese, 1992; Ewell, 1994; Dill, 1998; Gaul, 2005). There is also the perception that accreditation has become “too formulaic a process and too broad in scope to delve deeply into [an institution’s] real organizational and educational deficiencies” (Alstete, 2004, p. 18). Finally, accreditation self-evaluation, as designed by the organizations accrediting higher education, is intended to be a continuous process. However, in reality this is rarely true;

research shows that most institutions plan for and perform their respective accreditation processes only when time is nearing for the required periodic review (Barker & Smith, 1998).

New Challenges for Accreditation

Regardless of these criticisms, accreditation continues to be reviewed by the general public and by institutional administrators as a vital indicator of educational quality. This is true in spite of the fact that neither the public nor even most higher education administrators know much about the process or significance of accreditation (Greenberg, 2001). In 1999 CHEA conducted a survey to learn what the general public knew and believed about the role of accreditation in ensuring a quality education (Eaton, 1999). The results found that a large majority of individuals polled believed that colleges and universities must meet moderate to high standards in order to become accredited. “Interestingly, a large portion do not know who performs accreditation, but a clear majority said they would not consider taking a course from an institution that is not accredited” (Eaton, 1999, as reported in Alstete, 2004, p. vi). These results reflected an earlier survey to educators by the American Council on Education in 1986. The ACE survey focused on accrediting issues involving 520 institutions of higher education. Not only did the poll results show that 90 percent of survey respondents agreed that accreditation provides a useful index of institutional quality, but a majority also expressed the belief that accreditation is a useful tool for self-evaluation and a stimulus for improvement (Anderson, 1987).

“To the federal government and the public, accreditation assures that an institution meets minimum standards of quality” (McMurtrie, 2000, p. A31). Even with all the criticism of the current institutional accreditation processes, it is still believed that self-regulation through a system of regional or national accreditation offers the methods and support to continue and reinforce educational integrity (Benjamin, 1994). Eaton (2003) stated that the private self-

regulation that the current accreditation system allows conforms to the decentralized nature of higher education and ensures “institutional autonomy, academic freedom, collegial governance, [and] independent intellectual inquiry” (p. B15). The alternative to the autonomy inherent in the present system would be government-directed licensing and accreditation that could interfere with an institution’s independence. Given that “the history, culture, appeal, and strength of higher education in the United States...is based in large part on the principles of academic freedom, self-direction, institutional diversity, and self-governance” (Alstete, 2004, p. 3), educators are naturally opposed to the alternative of government control (Greenberg, 2001; Harvey, 2004; Glidden, 2004).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to preserving the autonomy inherent in the current system of institutional accreditation in the United States is the recent charge by some members of Congress that the system is obsolete, complex, and secretive and that it virtually ignores the real assessment of institutional quality and educational integrity (Morgan, 2002; Farrell, 2003; Bollag, 2004). These charges have, once again, threatened to sever the traditional connection between accreditation and the allocation of federal funds. In 2003 the American Council of Trustees and Alumni published a report called *Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?* that severely criticized the current accreditation system and called for Congress to “decouple” accreditation from federal student loan programs. Charging that “accreditation is a poor indicator of educational quality,” the report found support among some legislators and put representatives of the accreditation community on the defensive as Congress prepared for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2005 (ACTA, 2003, p. 1). Key accreditation issues featured in the pending reauthorization bill that challenge customary accreditation practices focus on student learning outcomes, distance learning, transfer of credit, and public

information about the status of an institution's accreditation. Through efforts coordinated by CHEA, the accreditation community has prepared an official response that is generally supportive of innovations and improvements in these four areas. However, according to a CHEA report, certain provisions in the proposed bill may serve "to erode the self-regulatory authority of colleges and universities with regard to academic quality" while legislating government oversight of the accreditation process (CHEA, 2004, p. 1).

The Institutional Self-Study

Evolution of the Self-Study

Beginning in the 1980s institutional accreditation in the United States was moving away from traditional quantitative assessments—such as operating budgets, the number of reference books available in the school library, and the number of faculty possessing terminal degrees—toward a more qualitative approach that considered broader education issues (Palmer, 1993). This was due partly to the wide diversification in the types of institutions that had become established in the latter part of the 20th century. Both accrediting agencies and educational institutions alike found it increasingly challenging to undertake an external accreditation review based on general standards and criteria for such diverse postsecondary education entities as state-funded universities, for-profit professional colleges, technical institutes, proprietary career schools, military training installations, distance learning schools, Job Corps Centers, and manufacturer-based training schools. Recognizing that each type of institution had its own particular mission, goals, student population, instructional delivery methods, outcome objectives, and technologies available, accreditation associations moved their focus from an external review toward reliance on self-evaluation and self-improvement by the educational institutions themselves (Alstete, 2004).

Another reason the accrediting organizations were moving away from the traditional prescriptive assessments of the learning environment was in response to public and legislative pressure to shed light on student outcomes and institutional effectiveness (Barker & Smith, 1998; McMurtrie, 2000). Therefore, the focus of accreditation shifted from meeting minimum standards to describing effective systems and processes designed to meet a college's mission and goals. The institutional self-study, considered by many to be the primary instrument for this self-evaluation, evolved to become the centerpiece of the accreditation process (Bender, 1983; Glidden, 1983; Kells, 1995; Barker & Smith, 1998; Greenberg, 2001).

Self-Study and Institutional Assessment

The self-study has two primary purposes: “the first is to help improve the quality of the institution, and the second is to identify goals that are clearly stated and appropriate considering the mission of the institution and the human, fiscal, and physical resources available to the institution” (Barker & Smith, 1998, p. 742). By way of the self study, an institution would validate its purpose by describing the goals and objectives considered appropriate for its type of enterprise, by outlining its processes for assessing the attainment of these goals, and by using assessment results for institutional improvement. Since the 1970s the self-study requirement has increased in importance “as demands for institutional effectiveness, accountability, and coordinated study and planning processes have accompanied the growing competition, economic constraints, and political pressures that institutions must face” (Kells, 1983, p. 120).

In addition to determining the institution's level of compliance with specific accreditation standards, the self-study also represents a formative evaluation of the institution, identifying both strengths and areas of improvement (Harvey, 2004). Astin (1993) considers the accreditation self-study an example of an “environment-only” (p. 36) assessment of an institution and one that

is designed to examine the effectiveness of a college's practices and procedures. Not only does the self-study include extensive data regarding enrollment, programs, faculty, and finances, it also contains "narratives of what [a] college or university presumes to be and how it is working and planning to maintain and improve its products" (Greenberg, 2001, p. 3). Bemis (1983) noted that "the aim of the self-study is to understand, evaluate, and improve rather than merely defend what already exists" (p. 171).

The parallel nature of institutional assessment and the institutional self-study is considered by some educators an advantage of the accreditation process as it is currently practiced in the United States. Contrary to the conclusions drawn by Graham, Lyman and Trow (1995), Dixon and Moorse (2000) and Kern (1990) believed accreditation self-studies may support a higher education institution's programs of assessment and strategic improvement. Alstete (2004) compared the accreditation self-study with the academic audit, an "externally driven peer review of internal quality assurance, assessment, and quality improvement systems" (p. 15). Originating in industry, the audit provides a useful snapshot of an institution's programs and services and enables interested constituents to determine the level of compliance to quality standards. With the rise in interest in educational accountability, the role of the self-study as an academic audit report is taking on increasing importance (Alstete, 2004). Barker and Smith (1998) provided a model for integrating accreditation into an institution's assessment and strategic planning processes. The integration of assessment, institutional research, and accreditation was also supported by Zikopoulos and Hourigan (2001) and Ratcliff, Lubinescu, and Gaffney (2001). Harvey (2004), who noted that "improvement is a spin-off from accreditation processes" (p. 210), also determined that the self-study can support a college's programs of institutional effectiveness.

Desirable Characteristics of a Self-Study

Bemis (1983) summed up the self-study in very simple terms: “the faculty, administration, and governing board declare what they want the institution to be and make their own appraisal of its present accomplishments and future potential” (p. 171). Greenberg (2001) concurred with this simplicity, describing the self-study as “narratives of what your college or university presumes to be and how it is working and planning to maintain and improve its product” (p. 3). Marcus (1984) determined that an effective self-study should include a detailed review of the following: institutional and program goals; the institution’s organizational structure and internal processes; fiscal, physical and learning resources; the curriculum; the faculty; the students; and current issues, including perceived weaknesses and future plans. He also went on to say that the self-study document should include appropriate quantitative data to support its findings. However, Marcus also warned that an over-reliance on numerical factors should be discouraged. He believed that the assessment of program goals, student learning, faculty performance, and curriculum must take a qualitative approach.

However, it was Kells (1980, 1983, 1995) who fully articulated the over-arching requirements of the institutional self-study. Based on years of research conducted alone and in cooperation with other educators (Kells & Kirkwood, 1979; Kells & Parrish, 1986), he found that the following attributes are desirable in an institution’s self-study process:

1. It should be internally motivated rather than seen merely as a response to an outside agency.
2. Top leadership of the institution must be committed and express this commitment.
3. The design of the self-study should be appropriate to the circumstances of the institution.
4. It should clarify goals and assess goal achievement.

5. There should be representative, appropriate and useful participation by members of all segments of the education community.
6. The process should be well-managed, utilizing effective problem-solving and group decision-making techniques.
7. The ability of the organization to function effectively should be studied and enhanced.
8. Some improvements should occur both during and as a result of the process.
9. A readable report should result from the process.
10. A better system of ongoing institutional research, self-assessment, and self-improvement should be a major product of the process.

Although few theoretical models have been developed to show the self-study process in higher education, most self-studies have apparently been successful since “the literature does not address unsuccessful self-studies” (Barker & Smith, 1998, p. 74).

The Challenge of Collaboration

In their study of over 200 institutions in the Northeast, Kells and Kirkwood (1979) determined that five steps should be taken if a self-study is to achieve the dual goals of assessing the institution with respect to accreditation standards and articulating specific objectives for the continued improvement of a school’s programs and services. These steps include designing the self-study process; organizing resources for its accomplishment; attending to the mechanics of the self-study process; using peer groups within the organization; and establishing cycles of study and planning. Most of these steps are preordained by procedures outlined in the accrediting organization’s self-study guide or by assessment systems already in place within the educational institution (Kells, 1995).

The use of peer groups in the self-study process, however, typically presents an institution with its greatest challenges. Although most educators agree that collaboration among faculty and administrators is essential to an effective and successful self-study report, many also

contend that this collaboration is not easily achieved (Glidden, 1983; Kells, 1995; Martin, Manning & Ramaley, 2001; Alstete, 2004). El-Khawas (1983) described how colleges and universities operate under a “precarious balance of power between governing bodies that represent the public interest, administrators who conduct the day-to-day affairs of the institution, and faculty members who play the primary role in defining and interpreting educational purposes and standards” (p. 59). Most of the challenges of institutional collaboration stem from the fact that, while managers and administrators primarily “drive” the self-study processes, it is the faculty who are relied upon to verify compliance with accreditation standards in the most significant portion of the self-study report: the review of educational programs. Brown (2004) stated that “only those who design and deliver programmes and assess and accredit students are in a position to assure...the quality of those programmes and qualifications” (p. 3). Newton (2000) described how two objectives of accreditation and institutional assessment—quality assurance and institutional improvement—may result in conflicting agendas among different groups in the institutional community. Specifically, efforts to validate the status quo in the self-study report may be at odds with efforts to bring innovation into the operations of the institution.

Brown (2004) discussed the difference in perception of the assessment and self-study processes between faculty on the one hand and administrators, or “academic managers,” on the other. He found that administrators tend to view the accreditation process as “accountability-led,” whereas faculty views the process as “improvement-led” (p. 90). Administrators, he determined, were more intent on using the self-study to verify that institutional systems currently in place are operating as prescribed by the accrediting agency. However, the faculty was more intent on showing how accreditation could bring about areas of improvement and innovation in the college’s classrooms and labs. Brown’s “accountability-led” administrators were a reflection

of Dill and Massy's (1996) "culture of compliance" (p. 22) where educators were described as less focused on academic improvement and more intent upon documenting adherence to accreditation standards.

Culture, Values and the Self-Study Process

Dill and Massy (1996) wrote of a "resistance to collegial interaction around issues of educational quality" (p. 19). The fact that different groups operating within the educational community find it challenging to collaborate on a single document intended to portray the institution's level of compliance with accreditation standards is well documented. Clark (1989) described the cultural differences within the college community where administrators focus on efficiency, productivity and accountability, while faculty values peer review, self-governance, and curriculum preeminence. Alstete (2004) observed that "differences between the two cultures can cause difficulties in facilitating the accreditation process by interfering with communication and inhibiting institutional change" (p. 71). He went on to say that "colleges and universities by their nature are staffed by educated, often opinionated, creative, and self-directed individuals who are not afraid to defend divergent opinions" (p. 73).

Kells (1995) found that the situation described above is exacerbated by the fact that most postsecondary faculty and administrators "have no training in the skills they need to work well in groups" (p. 6). The lack of interactive skills and cohesiveness often prevalent in academia is largely the result of the nature of its organizational structure. To start, patterns of governance generally are mixed in the higher education community. Faculty members traditionally manage their programs independently, whereas institutional functions are most often determined by administration. Services supporting classroom instruction, such as admissions, advisement and counseling, are often led by non-academic staff members. In addition, appropriations and long-

term institutional planning may be decided by politicians and community leaders. The lack of mutual contact in day-to-day business presents a challenge when representation from across the spectrum of services and disciplines is sought for the purpose of preparing the self-study. To complicate things further, “the program and service functions at colleges, unlike profit-making product-oriented institutions, are usually not sequential and therefore not highly interdependent. The subunits vie for attention and ‘ownership’ of the clients [and] cooperation is relatively low” (Kells, 1995, p. 4).

Educational organizations, therefore, tend to be fragmented, and the leaders of the various subunits are inexperienced at working together to solve problems, let alone to develop a self-study document intended to portray the entire institution. Consequently, management in higher education is typically more reactive instead of pro-active (Kells, 1995), and vested interests often prevail when decisions are handed down (Bender, 1983). This helped create the “divide of culture and experience” between faculty and administrators found at the University of Vermont (UVM) by Martin, Manning and Ramaley (2001, p. 96). In making preparations for the institution’s accreditation self-study, educators at UVM soon discovered that there was a serious disconnect between the faculty and administration’s perceptions of the other group’s effectiveness in assuring educational quality. Martin, Manning and Ramaley (2001) wrote the following:

Faculty often view administrators as bureaucratic, unscholarly, business minded, impatient with faculty concerns, and insensitive to academic values. For their part, administrators see faculty as conservative, suspicious of the administration, reluctant to change, unwilling to contribute to the daily operations of the institution, and, in some cases, cynical about whether any change is either possible or desirable. (p. 96)

What was found at the University of Vermont was not unusual. Ryan (1993) saw that conflict in the institutional assessment process was normal, and that “campus decision making is

fraught with conflict and always will be” (p. 80). His findings were consistent with those of Hofstede (1998) who believed that there really are no shared values at the core of an organization’s culture and that most organizational practices simply reflect the values of significant top managers. (Brown [2003] referred to this latter concept when found in the academic arena as the “hierarchy of esteem” [p. 8]). Hofstede (1998) went on to describe how an organization’s subcultures may be covertly antagonistic, and how these various groups may seek to establish or impose their own definitions of reality when the opportunity arises. Organizational development theorists Hultman and Gellermann (2002) concurred; they observed that tension between individuals and organizations “is inevitable and has always existed” and that the values of organizations and their members are not always in alignment (p. 6).

Trice and Beyer (1993) felt that the challenges of collaboration are especially acute in professional organizations where subject-matter experts such as academic faculty are allowed considerable autonomy in their day-to-day operations. This can create a situation where reliance on management decisions is less important and where administrators may be alienated from the concerns of the rank and file members of the organization. This perception is shared by Beatty (1998, as reported in Hester, 2003) who found that knowledge workers identified with their work, not necessarily with the organization where the work is performed. As specialists, these workers recognized that they know more about their areas of expertise than do their designated managers or administrators. For this reason, their loyalty tended to be to their craft or profession—not to the organization where they may be employed. These “anti-management characteristics of academia” may become the stumbling blocks for formulating and completing a successful self-study (Kells, 1995, p. 6).

Related Studies

There have been many doctoral dissertations devoted to topics concerning institutional and program accreditation. A very small number of them have focused on the perceptions held by members of the educational community toward postsecondary accreditation and its processes. Only one to my knowledge has included a focus on the self-study process.

Young (1973) prepared “An Analysis and Comparison of Public Community College Faculty, Administrators and Accreditation Team Members Perceptions of North Central Association Accreditation.” Although his review of the literature indicated differences in perception between these groups, his ANOVA findings rejected the null hypotheses that such differences in perception were prevalent. Also focusing on a particular regional accrediting organization, Farrow (1975) studied “The Accreditation Process of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as Perceived by Staff Members at Ten Selected Public Junior Colleges in Alabama.” Results from this study showed that these staff members were committed to the peer review process of accreditation, perceived accreditation to be a positive influence on the institution, and agreed that accreditation teams were partially subjective in their reviews. His study, however, did not differentiate between the perceptions of faculty or administrators.

Yarbrough (1983) researched “The Perceptions of Community and Junior College Presidents, Self-Study Steering Committee Chairpersons and the Faculty Toward the Self-Study and Accreditation Process.” The results of her study found that there was a statistical difference between these groups. Each of the three groups perceived that success in the self-study was attributed to different sets of variables. The steering committee chairpersons, for example, believed that useful reports, problem-solving, and the participation of faculty and administration were most indicative of a successful self-study report. The presidents perceived that only one

variable, the freer exchange of ideas, was indicative of success for the self-study. Faculty members cited the most variables indicating self-study success: useful reports, freer exchange of ideas, problem-solving, student participation, and benefits outweighing the cost of the self-study process.

In a study similar to Yarbrough's, Harris (1983) prepared a qualitative multi-case study examining factors that influenced the self-study component of the Middle States Association's accreditation process. His research addressed a number of issues regarding the relationship between the self-study component of regional accreditation and improved institutional effectiveness. Through interviews with faculty and administrators Harris identified ten factors which influenced the self-study in achieving its goal of improved institutional effectiveness.

These factors were:

1. Support from the accrediting agency
2. Commitment of the institutional leader
3. Internal motivation
4. Attention to process strategies
5. An ongoing process
6. Capacity for ongoing institutional research
7. Hardship imposed
8. Quality of the self-study report
9. Quality of the site visit team
10. Congruence between self-study findings and site team findings

Finally, Walker (1993) prepared a study of "Attitudes of Pennsylvania Community College Faculty Regarding Middle States Accreditation." Using an attitudinal survey among

faculty at 13 community colleges in Pennsylvania, all of which were accredited by the Middle States Association Commission on Higher Education, Walker used statistical sampling procedures to assess differences in faculty attitudes regarding nine factors. These factors included, among others, the recency of involvement in accreditation; experience with the self-study process; number of years of teaching experience; level of support from the college president; amount of in-service training received in preparation for the self-study, and amount of release time provided for the steering committee. Her conclusions held that the presence or absence of certain of the factors in question resulted in a positive attitude toward accreditation. Specifically, the more recent one's experience with the self-study, the more one had a positive attitude about the process; the availability of in-service training resulted in more positive attitudes about the self-study; the president's support was perceived to be a necessary component of the self-study; release time to work on subcommittees resulted in more positive attitudes about the process; serving as a team evaluator engendered a more positive attitude; and overall, the faculty surveyed had a positive attitude about Middle States Accreditation.

Although the studies cited above deal with perceptions about accreditation only one was focused exclusively on the self-study process. The Yarbrough (1983) study was a multiple regression statistical analysis that was based on factors identified in the Kells and Kirkwood (1979) study of postsecondary schools in the Northeast. It focused on an established set of positive outcomes of the self-study process as indicators of success. The present study, by contrast, is a qualitative analysis of perceptions of the institutional self-study based on factors articulated by the faculty and administrators participating in the self-study process.

Conclusions

The review of the literature for this study has shown that, in spite of its critics and repeated efforts to undermine its authority, the current system of higher education accreditation remains intact and continues to exert a powerful force on the education landscape. The failure of recent attempts to thwart long-standing traditions and processes practiced by this country's regional, national and specialized accrediting agencies may be attributed to the ability of the combined education and accreditation communities to deflect these challenges or, at least, to offer some measures of compromise in order to safeguard the sanctity of academic freedom and institutional self-direction. The failure of accreditation's critics to bring about significant change may also be due to the fact that a more efficient, objective, and reliable system for institutional recognition has not been proposed to replace current accreditation procedures.

While the subject of accreditation with its many complementary topics is well covered by educators and theorists, significant research on the topic of the accreditation self-study is lacking in all but the practitioner's perspective. What little literature exists largely discusses what practices may result in a successful self-study, how the self-study may be used with various constituencies within the education community, and what pitfalls should be avoided in the process of developing the self-study report. Three reasons may account for this paucity of research: (1) educators may see the self-study as an exercise whose scope, dimensions and content are carefully specified by the accrediting organization, thereby leaving little room for innovation or creative design; (2) the examination of the interpersonal dynamics that play such a significant role in the self-study process may be perceived as an entirely separate topic of research to be found in literature devoted to organizational design, industrial psychology, or one of the other behavioral sciences; or (3) the fact that Kells was such a significant and frequent

presence in the field of self-study research from the early 1970s through the 1990s may deter further academic curiosity in this direction.

Of singular importance to this study is the fact that virtually all of the scholarly literature available for review addresses accreditation and self-study issues from the perspective of the traditional four-year college or university. Although there were occasional references to community or two-year colleges, no research was found that addressed the accreditation concerns of the vocational or technical education institution. Due to the fact that the number of public and private occupational institutions overwhelmingly exceeds the number of traditional two- and four-year colleges in the United States, this present study may be of value to a sizeable constituency of postsecondary educators. Research generated by this study may begin to fill the gap created by the omission of vocational and technical college data on the subjects of institutional accreditation and perceptions of the self-study process.

The literature reviewed for this study that was of greatest interest to me was that which covered the interpersonal dynamics of the self-study process. As an education professional dedicated to effective practices of accreditation review for postsecondary occupational institutions, I was curious to discover if—as the literature suggests—an educator's experience, values and perceptions influence his or her participation in preparing the self-study. The observations of institutional culture made by Kells (1995); Clark (1989); Martin, Manning and Ramalay (2001); Alstete (2004); and Brown (2004) concurred with the findings of the organizational development theorists cited above and led me to suspect that a collaborative project such as the institutional self-study may be influenced by the perceptions of those who participate in its development. The purpose of this study was to examine these perceptions and to determine their influence, if any, in the self-study process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine faculty and administrator perceptions of the COE accreditation self-study in Georgia's technical colleges and to provide a description of these perceptions, including the personal values underlying them. The study was also designed to explore the influence that these perceptions may have on the institutional self-study report. This chapter addresses the methods used in the research.

Design of the Study

This examination of faculty and administrator perceptions of the institutional self-study was a qualitative comparative multiple case study. I focused on the phenomenon of self-study perceptions between faculty and administrators among select institutions of Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) system. Data was gathered by way of structured open-ended interviews with a purposefully selected sample of technical college faculty and administrators.

The problem was appropriate for qualitative inquiry since the research was intended to discover the meanings and interpretations that different members of the technical college community have about the accreditation self-study (Sherman and Webb, 1988). Not only did I want to know what various members of the college faculty and administration thought about the self-study and the process of developing this document, but I also wanted to know if these perceptions influence the self-study report. Another element of this research study that was characteristic of qualitative research was the fact that the researcher was the primary data

collector. The analysis employed an inductive research strategy, also typical of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2001). Finally, the data for this study came from interviews, a further defining characteristic of qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

A case study was appropriate to this research because (1) it concentrated on the single phenomenon of the institutional self-study; (2) it was limited to an examination of the phenomenon in discrete entities—individual technical colleges in this case; (3) it sought to uncover the interplay of significant factors that are characteristic of the phenomenon; and (4) the goal of the research was both to describe the phenomenon in depth as well as to provide interpretations of events that occur (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Additional factors that made this research appropriate for a case study were the facts that it was an investigation of a contemporary phenomenon guided by empirical inquiry (Yin, 1994) and that the study was focused on a delimited or bound system of objects under study (Smith, 1978). This particular research project was characterized as a “particularistic” case study in that it focused on a particular situation or phenomenon: the accreditation self-study and the perceptions that may shape it (Merriam, 2001).

Another aspect of this research project that further enhanced its appropriateness as a case study was that it was comprised of layers of objects of evaluation (Patton, 2002). The research began with an analysis of individual instructors or administrators where each participant represented a significant object of inquiry. The data collected from individual interviews at a particular study site were then combined to produce a composite study of the phenomenon at that particular technical college. A third layer of evaluation was determined by combining the research data from all the technical colleges where research was conducted, thereby producing a state-wide interpretation of the phenomenon. Because the research involved an examination of

the phenomenon of self-study perceptions at several technical colleges and because the research from each individual campus could stand alone in an interpretation of the phenomenon, this project became a multiple case study. The study was further classified as a comparative one since it included the presentation of individual institution case data as well as cross-case descriptive comparisons aimed at enhancing an understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

The Research Setting

Georgia's Technical College System

The first significant piece of federal legislation directed toward vocational education, the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, was co-sponsored by a Georgian, Senator and future governor Hoke Smith, who “recognized the need for training in the methods of modern industry if the state was to progress” and overcome the decline of the cotton economy that had once been the life-blood of the South (Breedon, 2004). The onset of the Great Depression made a focus on economic development and the skills to support it even more urgent for both state and national legislators. In 1943 the Georgia State Board of Education approved a plan for a system of Area Trade Schools, and by 1944 the first such institution opened in Clarkesville in north Georgia.

There were only two area trade schools in operation in Georgia by the early 1950s, the second opening in 1948 in the southern part of the state. The State Supervisor of Trade and Industrial Education saw that Georgia needed a more aggressive system of vocational training as job-seeking veterans returned from Korea at the same time that the mechanization of agriculture was displacing thousands of rural workers across the state. To address the increased demand for technical training, the State Board of Education approved a set of policies in 1958 for establishing Area Vocational-Technical Schools. “By the late 1960s thousands of Georgians

were enrolling in the 19 [vocational-technical] schools that had opened in Georgia during that decade” (Breedon, 2004). This enrollment growth continued over the next fifteen years.

In 1984 Governor Joe Frank Harris created the State Board of Postsecondary Vocational Education which ultimately led to the creation of the Department of Technical and Adult Education in 1988. By the year 2000, more than one billion dollars had been invested in modernizing the state’s increasing number of technical institutions (Breedon, 2004). That same year the state legislature passed the Education Reform Act which, among other things, allowed Georgia’s technical institutes to change their names to “technical colleges” and to offer associate degrees.

Since its inception in 1988, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education has registered over 1,800,000 students in its technical colleges and associated university technical divisions (DTAE, n.d.). During this time the agency has built a statewide network for technical education that includes 34 technical colleges, 31 branch campuses and four college technical divisions housed in regional junior colleges. These institutions offer a variety of associate degree and diploma programs as well as continuing education and economic development services.

Sample Selection

Selection of Institutions

My interest was phenomena occurring within the institutions governed by Georgia’s Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE). Since there are many similarities between the mission, operations, practices and values of these 34 DTAE colleges, I chose to focus my attention on three schools that would be representative institutions with similar experience in the accreditation cycle. Because the research questions centered on the institutional

self-study conducted for purposes of accreditation, because an overwhelming majority of the DTAE colleges are accredited by the Council on Occupational Education (COE), and because I aimed to draw conclusions that may be interpreted to be valid for a majority of the DTAE colleges, I identified two criteria for the selection of the schools to be included in the study sample. These criteria were: (1) the school must be COE-accredited; and (2) the school must have recently (within the previous 24 months) completed the self-study process. Nine of the 34 technical colleges within the DTAE system met these two criteria.

These nine institutions were found to be evenly divided into three size categories—small institutions, medium institutions and large institutions—based on student full-time-equivalency enrollment. Three small institutions had FY2004 enrollment below 1160; three had enrollment of 1160 to 1700; and three had enrollment of over 1700. Of the three institutions in each size category, the one chosen for this study was the institution that had undergone the most recent COE accreditation review.

The three technical colleges where the research for this study was conducted are described below. It is important to note that the names of the actual institutions have been changed in order to safeguard the confidentiality of the respondents in this study. For this reason the descriptions of the three colleges are devoid of specific details that may serve to identify their actual names and locations.

Anderson Technical College

Located in a rural area approximately two hours from Atlanta, Anderson Technical College is the smallest institution in the multi-case study with a quarterly enrollment averaging 650 credit students. These students are served by 28 full-time instructors, 37 part-time instructors, and 19 administrators and administrative staff members. Established in the early

1960s as an Area Vocational-Technical School under the control of the local school board, Anderson Tech currently offers 12 associate degree, 23 diploma, and 48 technical certificate programs. The school has no branch campuses. As with many of the state's technical colleges located in rural areas, Anderson Tech has seen a gradual shift of demand from agricultural and industrial programs to those programs that serve the technology and personal services fields. Due to the off-shore relocation of businesses that once served as significant employers in the community, the local economy is in a state of transition as new industries are sought to replace the old ones.

Bradley Technical College

One of the oldest institutions in the Department of Technical and Adult Education system, Bradley Technical College is located in a rural area of the state that has experienced a steady increase in population over the past decade due to the region's moderate climate, diverse outdoor activities, and a cost of living that is lower than that of metropolitan Atlanta located about an hour away. Bradley Tech may be considered one of the system's medium-sized institutions with a quarterly enrollment of approximately 1,000 credit students at its main campus and one branch campus. The college employs 40 full-time and 60 part-time instructors as well as 28 administrators and administrative staff members. Like many of its sister institutions, the mix of programs offered at Bradley Technical College has evolved over the years from predominately industrial programs like welding, carpentry, and auto mechanics to technology and service-oriented programs such as computer information systems, early childhood care, and allied health.

Crawford Technical College

The largest institution included in the study, Crawford Technical College was established in the early 1960s and is located in one of Georgia's regional metropolitan centers. Between its main and two branch campuses, Crawford Tech serves an average of 2,000 credit students each quarter. There are 250 full-time faculty, administrators and staff employed at the college. Unlike many of its sister institutions, the area served by Crawford Technical College has not experienced a significant decline in its manufacturing base although there have been a number of changes in its employers as new businesses come into the area to replace those that have relocated elsewhere. The college's service area is a major regional health care center, and Crawford Tech's mix of programs reflects the importance of this segment of the local economy.

Selection of Interview Subjects

Using a minimum samples strategy, five faculty members and five administrators were interviewed at each of the three selected institutions. I felt that this strategy was appropriate based on an expectation of reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and the similarities of the work environment influencing the participants (Patton, 2002). The purposeful selection of interview subjects was based on the following criteria: (1) interviewees were full-time employees of DTAE of at least eight years and had been actively involved in the institutional self-study process; (2) the administrators interviewed were selected from those individuals with leadership or supervisory positions such as director, dean, vice president, or president; and (3) the faculty members selected for interviews were representative of different occupational divisions within the school (for example: industrial, business, technical, human services, agricultural, allied health, etc.). I relied on maximum variation sample selection to assure that the five selected faculty members represented a cross-section of instructional

programs offered at the institution and that the five selected administrators represented the variety of services and support departments found in DTAE colleges (Patton, 2002). By interviewing employees with at least eight years of experience in a DTAE institution, I was assured of interviewing individuals with experience in at least two six-year COE accreditation cycles. Multiple experiences with the accreditation and self-study cycles may have increased the likelihood that the subject would have formed an opinion of the process. Furthermore, the fact that the selected institution recently completed an accreditation review assured that perceptions of the self-study process were more or less fresh in the minds of faculty and administrators.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was the interview using a standardized open-ended interview protocol. This method was determined to be appropriate owing to the personal nature of the information discussed. I began with general questions designed to put the subject at ease and address some fundamental issues of the subject's experience with the self-study process. The structured interview format that followed then covered some specific issues relating to the research questions, thereby allowing the researcher to compare and contrast general perceptions about these issues. Finally, a role-reversing closing question permitted the interviewee to introduce new topics of discussion which may prove informative in relation to the research questions. (See Interview Protocol in Appendix A.)

Once the presidents of the three technical colleges had agreed to participate in this study, he or she provided me with a list of all full-time faculty and administrators who met the above criteria. This list included the faculty members' and administrators' program or service area as well as their number of years working for DTAE. A date for visiting the campus to conduct the interviews was also set with the president. In selecting the interview subjects I purposefully

chose a cross-section of representatives from diverse programs as well as from a range of years of experience with DTAE. I then contacted each selected faculty member and administrator to discuss the project and arrange a meeting time. When a selected individual agreed to participate in the project I sent to him or to her a Research Consent Form to be returned to me prior to my arrival at the school. After I arrived on campus I gave each participant an Interview Consent and Confidentiality Statement to review prior to the scheduled interview. I interviewed each subject, one-on-one, in a private setting for one time only. A pre-test of interviews indicated that the session would last from 30 to 45 minutes. (See Appendix B for Research Consent Form and Interview Consent and Confidentiality Statement.)

In addition to interviews, I also used document analysis as a data collection method. Of particular interest to me was the institutional self-study, a document that disclosed the extent to which the institution complies with the standards of accreditation required by the Council on Occupational Education. This document was intended to be the result of close collaboration between members of a school's faculty and administration. Other documents that proved marginally useful to the study were copies of agenda and minutes from meetings relating to the preparation of the institutional self-study. Similarly, memos and other communications relating to the preparation of the self-study were examined on those occasions when they were available for review. The document analysis was used to verify interview responses and to substantiate time and events in the self-study preparation process.

Description of Data Analysis

I used a grounded theory strategy within the parameters of the case study to analyze the collected data, determine common categories and properties of behavior, and build from this a systematic substantive theory that is a reasonably accurate statement of the matter studied and

that is “couched in a form that others going into the field could use” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.113). According to Merriam (2001) grounded theory is a qualitative methodology particularly suited to “investigating problems for which little theory has been developed,” as is the case with the phenomenon under consideration in this study (p. 112). Darkenwald (1980) feels that generating substantive theory through this methodology is especially valuable in adult education “in order to improve practice through gaining a better understanding” of the field (p. 69).

Using a process described by Guba and Lincoln (1981), information was gathered from the transcripts resulting from the tape-recorded subject interviews and abstracted onto index cards. General concepts were developed as identical or similar information derived from each institution was assembled. From these general concepts, a list of prevailing principles was developed. These principles reflected the faculty and administrator perceptions of the institutional self-study and were found to fall within the following five subject categories:

1. The value of accreditation
2. Desirable outcomes of the institutional self-study
3. Improvements resulting from the self-study
4. The self-study and accreditation processes
5. Personal values guiding one’s work

The phenomenon of self-study perceptions was first analyzed at the institutional level. Results from the analysis of each institution were then compared and contrasted. The three “in-case” analyses and the comprehensive “cross-case” analysis are presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

The four stages of grounded theory development described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987) reflect the above activity. First I relied on the constant comparative analysis

of data to compare individual perceptions on the part of faculty and administrators, and then to generate tentative principles or categories pertaining to the phenomenon. The second stage of analysis involved integrating these categories of behavior and perception in order to discover common meaning and similarities. In the third stage I pared down the number of categories into a core group of highly conceptual ones that I used to generate hypotheses about the phenomenon. Finally, stage four resulted in the formulation of a systematic substantive theory that formed a reasonably accurate statement of faculty and administrator perceptions of the accreditation self-study.

Validity and Reliability

Although reality is an interpreted concept in qualitative research, the data's degree of internal validity is reflective of how the researcher would expect a phenomenon to exist and function in the world (Merriam, 2002). The focus of this research study—perceptions by faculty and administrators of the accreditation self-study—is a topic with which the researcher has considerable experience as both an instructor and an administrator at two of Georgia's technical colleges, and as a staff member at the Council on Occupational Education. The research findings resulting from this study were congruent with my experience with and expectations of the phenomenon. For this reason I am confident there is a high degree of internal validity to this study.

Internal validity also represents the extent to which “research findings match reality” (Merriam, 2001, p. 201). This research project incorporated three strategies to enhance the study's internal validity: triangulation, peer examination, and the clarification of the researcher's bias. First, triangulation emerged from using fifteen instructors and fifteen administrators from three different technical colleges, thus providing multiple sources of data to confirm the findings

of this report. In fact, the cross-case analysis appearing in Chapter 4 of this report indicates the similarity of data gathered at the three institutions included in this study. Secondly, two professional colleagues on the staff of the Council on Occupational Education, both of whom possess institutional and accrediting agency experience in the self-study process, reviewed the researcher's findings as they emerged. This peer review contributed to the validation of the research findings by determining that the resulting conclusions were plausible within the context of Georgia's technical college system. Thirdly, the researcher's biases, assumptions, and theoretical orientation are described below. These views will assist the reader of the report to place its findings and conclusions in a perspective that is appropriate to the research setting.

The external validity of qualitative research determines how "generalizable" its results are. External validity is a measure of "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 2001, p. 207). Multiple case studies and cross-case analyses are strategies that enhance the degree of external validity, as is the use of predetermined questions and specific procedures for coding and analyzing data (Yin, 1994). By virtue of its multi-case design, standard interview protocol, and deliberate data coding and analysis, this research study exhibited a high degree of external validity.

The reliability of a qualitative research study indicates the extent to which its findings can be replicated (Merriam, 2001). It is also a measure of the study's dependability or the consistency of the results obtained from the data. Research techniques practiced for this study in order to enhance its reliability include triangulation, articulating the researcher's position, and outlining an audit trail. The use of multiple settings for gathering data from identical interview questions was a further example of triangulation that served, in this case, to enhance the study's reliability. Furthermore, the articulation of the researcher's assumptions, his purposeful sampling

processes to determine interview sites and subjects, and his explanation of the social context from which the data are collected contributed to the degree of reliability of the study. Finally, the researcher provided in a previous section of this chapter a very clear audit trail by explaining how he arrived at the final results of this study.

Methodological Limitations

This study was designed to address the perceptions toward the institutional accreditation self-study held by faculty and administrators in Georgia's technical college system. The nature of the study demanded a methodology designed for theory generation rather than theory verification. While this study was not intended to offer conclusive evidence pertaining to the institutional self-study, it hopefully will provide a foundation for future investigation into this important phenomenon.

This bounded multi-case study involved research conducted at three of the technical colleges within Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education. The particular institutions chosen for this study are accredited by the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education (COE), a national accrediting agency recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education that serves a variety of public and private postsecondary institutions. Faculty and administrator perceptions of the self-study and the accreditation process in this case study were assumed to be limited to considerations pertaining to COE and not necessarily any other accrediting agency. The three institutions included in this research project had completed an institutional self-study within twelve months of the study. The research focused on the perceptions of the accreditation self-study held by faculty and administrators. Because they generally do not take part in preparing the COE accreditation self-study, students were not included in the interview population.

The sample was limited for three reasons. First, gathering reliable and valid information on faculty and administrator perceptions of the self-study was considered possible by conducting interviews with a variety of participants in three separate colleges. Secondly, because all 34 DTAE colleges share common missions, structures and curricula, information gathered at the three selected institutions was not expected to be widely divergent. Thirdly, the time and expense required by the face-to-face data collection technique were within the researcher's means when limited to three institutions.

While the implications resulting from this study may be generalized to pertain to other technical colleges in Georgia and even to other postsecondary institutions, it was not the intent of this study to promote such generalization. Readers of this study may evaluate its outcomes and derive implications according to their individual experience with Georgia's technical college system in particular and with other postsecondary education establishments in general.

This research study focused on institutions in Georgia where the Education Reform Act of 2000 enabled degree-granting technical institutes to change their names to "technical colleges." A further consequence of the name change brought about by the Education Reform Act was, in the opinion of many technical college administrators, the opportunity for the transfer of credit from the technical colleges to the state's two- and four-year colleges. An important prerequisite for this transfer of credit, however, is that the technical college must be awarded regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). As a result of this perception, all of the COE-accredited technical colleges are currently seeking candidacy with SACS. Some of these institutions have indicated a desire to establish dual accreditation with both SACS and COE, largely due to the fact that, unlike COE, SACS does not have a review process that focuses on occupational programs. Other technical colleges in Georgia, however, are

carefully assessing their accreditation needs. Faculty and administrator perceptions of COE's self-study and accreditation processes may be a critical issue in this assessment.

Researcher's Bias

Studies which employ a human researcher in a qualitative methodology may be open to the criticism of researcher bias. Specific safeguards were built into the data collection and analysis phases of the research in order to minimize the effects of this bias. The interview protocol was field-tested prior to data collection to avoid the use of leading or ambiguous questions. All thirty interviews were recorded to insure accuracy and transcribed by an independent third party to assure objectivity. Data collected from interviews were compared to written documents to discover inconsistencies.

However, "the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). As these biases cannot often be totally eliminated in the research process, I will identify them here. My present position is associate executive director with the Council on Occupational Education, the administrative branch of the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education. Because of the potential impact that knowledge of my position might have on interview responses, I presented myself to study participants as a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I did not conceal my present position with COE, nor did I make it a part of my introduction to those participating in this study. Although a few interview participants were familiar with my past association with one of Georgia's technical colleges, most of them did not know I had left the DTAE system.

Prior to my appointment to the COE staff I served as a volunteer Commissioner on the Commission of COE. For the past seven years I taught a workshop called "How to Prepare for the Institutional Self-Study" twice a year for COE. The workshops are mandatory for institutions

seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation by the agency. The workshops are typically attended by hundreds of individuals each year. In the course of conducting these workshops I received much anecdotal information on the perceptions of faculty and administrators on the institutional self-study. It should be acknowledged that my preconceptions may have influenced my interpretation of the data provided by the participants of the study.

Prior to my appointment to the COE staff, I was employed as an administrator in one of Georgia's technical colleges. In my role as Vice President of Instructional Services I supervised and worked closely with faculty members. Both as Vice President at one college and as Director of Curriculum at another, I was instrumental in directing the institution's self-study initiative. Before assuming administrative responsibilities, I was employed for six years by DTAE as a full-time instructor in one of its colleges. During this time I contributed to the institution's first COE self-study report. For these reasons my reactions to the data may have been shaped by my feelings of identification with and empathy for the interview participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the accreditation institutional self-study held by faculty and administrators in Georgia's technical colleges. The study was also intended to describe the defining characteristics of these perceptions as well as the personal values underlying them. Finally, the study was intended to determine how the content of the institutional self-study was influenced by these perceptions. In this chapter of the report I presented the findings of the research conducted at the three institutions selected for the study. I first provided an in-case analysis of the three colleges, outlining the findings derived from each institution individually. This is followed by a cross-case analysis where the findings of all three institutions were compared and contrasted.

The In-Case Analyses

In this section of the chapter I reviewed the findings resulting from research done at each individual institution. Each college was examined as a case in itself. Following the analyses of the three separate colleges, a cross-case analysis was provided to reveal processes and outcomes that were either consistent or divergent for the three institutions under study.

Data gathered from all the transcripts revealed that the interview protocol elicited perceptions reflecting five primary topics related to the accreditation self-study:

1. The value of institutional accreditation
2. Desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report
3. The effectiveness of the institution's recent self-study process

4. Disagreements between faculty and administrators on self-study content
5. Faculty and administrator roles in the self-study process

The interview protocol also requested a description of the self-described “personal values” that guide the participant’s work at the institution.

Anderson Technical College

The accreditation self-study process at Anderson Technical College was managed by a steering committee appointed by the institution president and the designated COE liaison officer. The committee was comprised of vice presidents and department heads. The chairperson of the committee was the Vice President of Student Services. Preparation of the institutional self-study began in earnest approximately five months prior to the arrival of the accreditation visiting team. Under the leadership of both the college president and the steering committee chairperson, mandatory in-service training sessions were held to prepare faculty and staff for the self-study process. Throughout the preparation of the self-study report, committee and school-wide meetings were held to monitor progress.

For many of the faculty and administrators interviewed at Anderson Technical College for this research study, the accreditation process, the accreditation team visit, and the accreditation self-study were perceived as a single event. For example, questions relating explicitly to the self-study report, such as “What role did you play in preparing the self-study?” were often answered with references to activities relating to the team visit and not to the self-study report.

There was also some confusion about the leadership of the self-study initiative. Several faculty members indicated that the Vice President of Instruction was the “chairman” of the steering committee, while two of the administrators indicated that the Vice President of Student

Services held this position. One faculty member referred to two vice president “co-chairs” who directed the steering committee activities. Finally, the institution president at one point referred to himself as the “leader” of the steering committee. The reason behind this confusion became clear during one of the later interviews when the president admitted that leadership of the steering committee had been changed during the course of the self-study preparation. This change was due to revisions in the administrative responsibility for two of the vice presidents on the staff.

The value of accreditation

Both faculty and administrators agreed that the accreditation process exerts a positive influence on the institution. One administrator stated that it represents a “seal of approval” that inspires both public recognition of the institution and confidence in the integrity of its programs and services. Another referred to accreditation as “a common yardstick” to demonstrate levels of accomplishment. Accreditation provides “guidelines for institutional integrity,” according to a third member of the administration. Faculty members, in turn, often referred to “accountability” and the “public perception of quality” resulting from accreditation. This sentiment, stated in various ways, was broadly held by instructors and administrators alike. In addition, one faculty member and one administrator also stated that accreditation facilitates the transfer of credit from one institution to another.

Almost all the faculty members interviewed mentioned that accreditation also serves the institution by maintaining high educational standards and by identifying and improving areas of weakness. Stating that the accreditation process allows one to “see shortcomings,” one instructor specifically mentioned how helpful the process was to focus on standards to improve her

program. Another mentioned that accreditation permitted him to “know the strengths and weaknesses” in his area and “deal with them.”

Unlike the instructors interviewed, no administrators mentioned institutional improvement as a benefit of the accreditation process. Apart from its importance as a means of public recognition, one administrator mentioned that accreditation is of value in that it keeps an institution “on track with its mission.” An administrator who worked in human resources mentioned that accreditation serves to assure the academic credentials of the institution faculty.

Desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report

Both administrators and faculty members overwhelmingly agreed that a desirable outcome of the self-study report is to discover weaknesses within the institution and address these weaknesses, thereby improving the quality of the educational experience. When asked about desirable objectives, instructors responded with such comments as “to find out where you need to improve” and “to see if you are short anywhere in your program...and change the way we do that.” Asked the same question, administrators responded similarly: “institutional improvement, without a doubt;” “know where our faults lie and where our weaknesses are” so they can be “dealt with;” and “to find our weak points so we can find ways to strengthen them and make sure we get stronger in those areas.” It was interesting that representatives of both faculty and administration commented that the self-study report should not be used as a tool to “bash” or punish individuals or departments should the report reveal institutional shortcomings or weaknesses. Finally, only one instructor mentioned that the self-study report could be used to justify acquiring new equipment for his program.

Several faculty members and one administrator also stated that the self-study report should confirm that the institution meets performance and operating standards established by the

accreditation agency. Finally, one administrator also mentioned that the self-study report should “get departments back to their core mission.”

The effectiveness of the recent self-study process

Both faculty and administration participants agreed that the recent self-study required long hours to complete, that it often infringed on the faculty’s instructional time, and that it was occasionally a frustrating experience. They felt, unanimously, that the self-study process should have started much earlier. They also agreed that using another institution’s self-study report as a model was confusing and not effective in preparing Anderson Tech’s self-study report. There was also general agreement between faculty and administrators that DTAE should take measures to dovetail the institutional review processes required for COE accreditation and for the agency’s Performance Accountability Review (PAR), an internal quality assurance program whereby institutions report annual progress in meeting agency operating requirements and host a visiting team of DTAE peers every three years to verify compliance with these requirements. These COE and PAR review processes were seen as redundant. Finally, both faculty and administrators stated that institutional improvements, notably in the areas of advisory committee procedures and adequate instructional space, were undertaken immediately as shortcomings were revealed during the self-study preparation process.

Faculty participants were virtually unanimous in stating that the self-study process was “poorly managed” and “confusing”, as well as plagued by “time-wasting rewrites,” “busywork,” and redundant photocopying and data collecting activities. One instructor stated that “administration should have gotten their act together” before leading the institution through the self-study process. Although all faculty members stated that “teamwork” and “involving every employee of the college” were important to a successful self-study, several indicated that this did

not occur during the school's recent self-study process. One faculty member suggested that the school hire outside consultants to write the self-study report

Contrary to the perceptions of all the participating faculty members, however, only one administrator interviewed stated that a successful self-study required input from all the college's faculty and staff members.

Disagreements between faculty and administration on self-study content

Perceptions varied among faculty and administrators as to the level of disagreement between those who prepared portions of the self-study report and the members of the self-study leadership team responsible for the report's final version. Some faculty members believed that there were frequent occasions when faculty and leadership disagreed on the content of the self-study. As one instructor put it, "that happened a lot in this study." Another commented on "problems of interpretation" of the standards between faculty and leadership. Faculty who felt there were frequent disagreements on self-study content also stated that management alone decided which version would be printed in the final self-study report. As one instructor said, "pretty much the VP made a decision as to what was going to be required...or what we would do." An equal number of faculty members, however, believed that there were virtually no disagreements on self-study content, or, if there were, these disagreements were openly discussed and quickly resolved.

Administrators interviewed felt, unanimously, that there were very few, if any, differences of opinion between those who prepared the different components of the self-study report and members of the self-study steering committee. One administrator stated that there was an occasional "misinterpretation" of procedures that merely had to be clarified. In the few occasions where differences of opinion arose, the administration's perspectives generally

prevailed. One administrator stated that, although he received a lot of input from people who wrote the “little parts” of a particular self-study segment, he decided it would be best if he wrote the entire section himself since he had the “larger vision” of how the self-study should be done. Two other administrators shared this sentiment. One of these individuals commented that work submitted by a subordinate staff member was “not written appropriately in terms of what I knew the school was doing at that particular time.” In this case, this was not perceived by the administrator as a difference of opinion as much as it was a misinterpretation of the accreditation standard being evaluated.

The same instructors who stated that there were differences of opinion between faculty and administration over the self-study also claimed that they were asked to revise their respective program supplement reports. One instructor stated that she was asked to do “two or three revisions,” which resulted in a considerable waste of time in her opinion since she felt she was saying the same thing in each revision. In talking about the report revisions another instructor said, “That’s where we got into trouble.” He stated, “My words were rewritten” for the final program supplement portion of the self-study report. A third instructor stated that the self-study process was slow “due to the rewrites.” He also admitted that he was told how to rewrite sections of his self-study report. Another instructor, however, had no problems with the revisions, saying that they were not frequent and mostly involved updates of data appearing in the report.

Members of the administration interviewed for this project agreed that there were a number of revisions requested of faculty and other staff members. This, however, was largely due to “misinterpretations” of standards or criteria. Other revisions were made to assure that the report’s statements were an accurate reflection of the institution’s operations.

In spite of these differences, both faculty and administrators unanimously agreed that the resulting self-study report was an accurate depiction of the institution's compliance with COE accreditation standards.

Faculty and administrator roles in the self-study process

Both faculty and administrators agreed that it was important for faculty members to participate in the self-study process by reporting on educational programs and for administrators to participate by reporting on their respective services and operating areas. Faculty members generally agreed with one instructor who said, "Every employee should be involved" in the preparation of the self-study. Both faculty and staff also agreed that leadership in the self-study process was the responsibility of administration.

Personal values

There was virtually no difference between the self-described personal values stated by either faculty or administrators. For example, three instructors and three administrators listed "honesty" as a personal value. "High ethical standards" or "good work ethics" was also mentioned by a majority of each group interviewed. "Integrity" was another value listed by both faculty and administrators. A few participants listed values that relate to their jobs at the college. Two faculty members listed "organization" and "putting out the best students" as their personal values. Similarly, several administrators listed "open communication," "fairness" and "serving students" as among their personal values.

Summary

Perceptions about the accreditation self-study held by members of Anderson Tech's faculty and administration were considerably more similar than dissimilar. Both groups agreed that accreditation provided a "seal of approval" for the institution; that the accreditation self-

study provides opportunities to improve the college's programs and services; that the recent self-study provided an accurate depiction of the institution's compliance with accreditation standards in spite of the occasional frustrations with the process; that the accreditation self-study should be a joint effort of both faculty and administrators; and that the COE accreditation processes should be dovetailed with the agency's own program of quality assurance.

Faculty, however, shared several perceptions that were not expressed by members of the administration. Instructors noted the importance of accreditation in maintaining high educational standards. They overwhelmingly described the recent self-study experience as poorly managed, confusing, and lacking in teamwork and involvement by all members of the college community. Faculty members were generally divided in their perception of disagreements between instructors and administrators over content of the self-study report, with an equal number stating that such situations did and did not occur.

The primary distinction between faculty perceptions and those of the administrators interviewed was largely a matter of degree of agreement. For example, while most faculty members stated that the self-study should involve every employee of the college, only one administrator expressed this view. Whereas faculty described the self-study process as "poorly managed" and often "a waste of time," administrators simply referred to it as "difficult" or "time-consuming."

There were, however, a few perceptions by administrators that were unique to this group. Representatives of administration stated that compliance issues pertaining to mission and faculty credentials were significant benefits of accreditation. Administrators perceived that there were very few, if any, disagreements between instructors or staff members who wrote sections of the self-study report and the members of the steering committee responsible for its final copy.

Whereas some faculty members felt that management ignored the information they provided for sections of the self-study, members of the administration perceived that management's "larger vision" of the institution's processes justified these revisions.

Finally, the personal values of honesty, integrity, and good work ethics were frequently cited by members of both faculty and administration as instrumental in guiding their work at the institution. There was no substantive difference in the values described by these two groups.

Bradley Technical College

The self-study process at Bradley Technical College was coordinated by a steering committee which was co-chaired by two faculty members. Much of the guidance for the co-chairs came from the Vice President of Instruction who possessed more than 20 years of experience in directing accreditation compliance initiatives. The steering committee was appointed by the president with input from the Vice President of Instruction who was also the institution's COE Liaison Officer at the time. Campus-wide and committee in-service sessions were held to orient faculty and administrators for their roles in preparing the institutional self-study.

Most of the faculty members participating in this study confused the self-study and team visit activities of the accreditation process. Often, questions pertaining specifically to the self-study report were answered with references to the team visit. This did not occur during the interviews with the administrators.

Value of accreditation

Both members of the institution's faculty and its administration agreed that accreditation is important for public assurance of educational quality and for verifying that "benchmarks" were met or that "guidelines" were followed. One administrator referred to accreditation as a

“stamp of approval.” An instructor stated that accreditation was “proof that you’re following your own rules.” In addition, both faculty and administrators mentioned “institutional improvement” through the identification of “strengths and weaknesses” as part of the accreditation process. There were no significant differences in the way that faculty and administrators perceived the value of accreditation.

Desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report

Nine of the ten participants interviewed for this study at Bradley Tech stated that “institutional improvement” was a desirable outcome of the self-study process. Included in the faculty responses were statements of other desirable outcomes such as “to receive accreditation,” to receive “no recommendations” (a reference to the team visit), and to undertake an institutional self-examination with respect to the “established benchmarks” outlined in the COE standards. Certain members of the administration also mentioned that desirable outcomes of the self-study process were “a very well written self-study” and an “opportunity to work with faculty and staff from other areas [of the institution],” thereby “building rapport” within the educational community. Overwhelmingly, however, the common sentiment among both faculty and administrators was that institutional improvement was a desirable outcome of the self-study effort. All ten individuals interviewed for this study agreed that the self-study produced by the college successfully achieved this outcome. Improvements resulting from the latest institutional self-study included advisory committee processes, safety plans, budgeting processes, student retention, and instructional procedures. One instructor mentioned that acquiring new resources was a possible result of the self-study report. Institutional improvements cited by the college’s faculty were not significantly different from those listed by the school’s administrators.

The effectiveness of the recent self-study process

Almost all of the faculty members interviewed for this study stated that working on the self-study report was a time-consuming process that disrupted their instructional duties. One instructor referred to the self-study preparation as “a cumbersome obstacle to getting the [teaching] job done that we were entrusted to do.” Another stated that it required “long hours and weekends” to get accomplished. One claimed that work on the self-study was “a disruption of instructional time.” Still another instructor mentioned the “duplication of a lot of research” that proved most time-consuming. This person also suggested that the COE accreditation process be coordinated with DTAE’s own Performance Accountability Review (PAR) program. One instructor mentioned that “certain aspects [of self-study preparation] need to be taken off instructors;” he was referring specifically to “information gathering” which he felt could have been done more efficiently by administration. He even recommended that the instructors be provided with clerical help to deal with “the mountain of paperwork” that is a part of the self-study preparation. One faculty member stated that bringing in another school’s past self-study report for comparison purposes “created confusion” and “added more work and stress” to the process.

While faculty members saw the self-study as time-consuming and disruptive to their instructional duties, the administrators interviewed overwhelmingly perceived the recent self-study initiative in a positive light. One commented that “the self-study and team visit were wonderful experiences;” two others stated, respectively, that preparing the self-study was a “morale builder” and “a learning experience.” A fourth said, “I can’t tell you anything negative that has come from this process.” However, in a statement that reflected a little of the frustration perceived by the institution’s faculty members, one administrator said, “I personally believe very

strongly in the accreditation process, and yet it's a pain in the butt." That being said, she went on to say that "completing a self-study...builds morale and [a] family feeling at the institution."

Disagreements between faculty and administrators on self-study content

Contrary to anecdotal evidence that there is often disagreement between faculty and administrators on the issue of content of the self-study report, results from interviews at Bradley Technical College show that this was not the case at this institution. Three out of five faculty members interviewed stated that they were not aware of any differences of opinion between faculty and management on the subject of self-study content. One instructor stated that "faculty has the autonomy to write their program reports as they see them." Although one instructor stated that such differences of opinion, when they occurred, were "resolved by the pecking order," she went on to say that "administration will listen and is open to recommendations." Faculty, in general, praised the collaborative nature of the self-study effort.

This perception was shared by members of the school's administration. Again, three out of five individuals interviewed stated that they did not know of or were not familiar with any situation involving such disagreements. One admitted that "a few incidents" may have occurred, but that these were "resolved through communication, email, contact and discussion;" usually it was just "a matter of clarification or understanding" of the standard or criterion under consideration. As another administrator put it, "People came together for a meeting of the minds."

Just as there were no perceptions of significant differences of opinion of the self-study report between faculty and administrators, questions pertaining to revisions of the self-study report were summarily dismissed with a response of "I don't recall any;" "I can't think of any;"

or “there were no revisions other than grammar.” This sentiment was equally and unanimously shared by both faculty and administrators participating in the research study.

In the end, both faculty and administrators unanimously agreed that the resulting self-study report was an accurate depiction of the institution’s compliance with COE accreditation standards.

Faculty and administrator roles in the self-study process

Both faculty and administrators interviewed agreed that although management should direct and coordinate the self-study process, faculty members should be responsible for the individual educational program reports. One instructor out of five stated that “administration could have done more of the self-study preparation” to relieve some of the “burden” from instructors. One administrator admitted that she wished faculty would “have more buy-in and personal ownership of the self-study process.” Otherwise, there was no significant difference between the two groups’ views of faculty and administrator roles in preparing the institutional self-study.

Personal values

The list of values that guide their work as cited by instructors was very similar to the list mentioned by members of the school’s administration. “Good work ethics” topped the list for both groups, followed by “honesty” and “loyalty.” Faculty members also cited “morals,” “moral character” and “the Golden Rule” in possible reference to the role-model stature they share within their respective fields of study. Administrators, on the other hand, listed “accountability,” “adhering to rules” and “confidentiality” as values that may reflect specific job responsibilities within the domain of institutional leadership.

Summary

The perceptions of the institutional self-study report held by faculty and administrators at Bradley Technical College were virtually identical in all but one area of consideration. Both faculty and management felt that institutional accreditation serves primarily to provide public recognition of the quality of education offered at the college. Both groups agreed that the most desirable outcome of the accreditation self-study is institutional improvement and that this outcome was achieved with its most recent self-study report. Faculty and administrators also agreed that there were few, if any, differences of opinion between them on the issue of self-study content, and that there were no significant revisions of the self-study report requested by management to those who prepared portions of the report. Both instructors and administrators also perceived that administration should drive the self-study effort, but that faculty members should be responsible for reporting on educational programs. Even on the subject of personal values guiding one's work at the college there was considerable agreement that honesty, good work ethics and loyalty are the primary motivators for both groups of personnel.

However, these two groups did not agree on their perceptions of the recent self-study process. Faculty members saw the process in a very negative light, describing it as time-consuming, burdensome, and a disruption of their instructional time. On the other hand, the administrators interviewed described the recent self-study process as a "wonderful experience" and "morale builder."

Crawford Technical College

The accreditation self-study effort at Crawford Technical College was headed by the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, a long-time employee of the school with over 35 years of experience at the college with the last ten years focusing on accreditation and compliance issues.

Sections of the self-study report were prepared by existing standing committees that had already been organized as a part of the college's initial efforts to seek candidacy with the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These interdisciplinary committees were composed of faculty and administrators from all three of the institution's campuses. The committees submitted their report drafts to a four-person steering committee that checked the report drafts for spelling, grammar, and format continuity. This committee then forwarded the approved drafts to a "reading committee" composed of vice presidents and other executive administrators at the college. In the words of one of the vice presidents interviewed for this study, the reading committee reviewed the drafts "to make sure that what the team said was an accurate reflection of what was really going on from an administrative perspective." The college held in-service meetings at both the institutional and committee levels to prepare faculty and administrators for the self-study process.

Value of accreditation

Members of the college's faculty and administration expressed multiple views about the value of accreditation for their institution. However, a common thread among these views was the perception that accreditation generated public confidence in the college and confirmed that the school's operations met certain quality standards. Several members of both the faculty and the administration used the term "value" to describe a benefit of accreditation. For example, such statements as "accreditation gives us value as an institution," "accreditation adds value to the diploma," and "accreditation gives more value to the school from the perspective of the community" were commonly-held sentiments.

Only one member of the faculty (and no administrators) mentioned accreditation as part of an institutional improvement process, stating that “accreditation makes us look at ourselves and improve if we need to.”

Two administrators also cited access to federal financial aid and opportunities for course transfer as additional benefits of institutional accreditation. No faculty members included these as benefits of accreditation.

Desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report

All five faculty members and three of the five administrators interviewed for this study perceived that institutional improvement was the most desirable outcome of the institutional self-study. Comments such as “find our faults and fix them,” “if there are problems, we’d correct them,” “meeting standards and improving where necessary,” and “identify strengths and weaknesses and address those weaknesses” were typical of virtually all of their responses to questions relating to desirable self-study outcomes.

Institutional improvements that were generated as a result of the latest accreditation self-study, according to both faculty and administrators, included student retention strategies, advisory committee processes, and updated plans and procedures. Administrators also cited improvements in student services processes and in the continuity and consistency of program instruction. Two faculty members simply did not remember any improvements resulting from the self-study.

One faculty member also mentioned that the self-study was instrumental in “encouraging funding.” He went on to say how the self-study may be used to support requests for new hires or for other resource development within a particular program. He felt that the self-study presented

an appropriate opportunity to document such requests, although he admitted such requests were not always granted.

Two members of the administration also saw the self-study as a significant document for validating that the college was operating in accordance to accreditation standards and guidelines. One referred to it as “the capstone of the school’s ongoing operation.” Another mentioned that the self-study was useful in documenting “where you’ve been and where you currently are.”

Both faculty and administrators unanimously agreed that the recent self-study report was an accurate depiction of the institution’s compliance with accreditation standards.

The effectiveness of the recent self-study process

Comments about the recent self-study effort at Crawford Tech were varied. There was general agreement between faculty and administrators that while the self-study is a difficult and time-consuming process, it is, nonetheless, worthwhile for the institution. One instructor referred to it as “a pain in the neck,” and another said the process was marred by “a lot of overkill in preparation.” An administrator referred to the process as “a drudgery.” However, it was widely perceived that the self-study had “a positive impact on the school,” although not many shared the view of one instructor who said of the recent self-study process that “everything went smoothly.” Similarly, not many agreed with the administrator who stated that “it was a pleasant experience this past time.”

Two faculty members and one administrator also compared the school’s COE institutional accreditation efforts with the processes necessary to receive program accreditation by certain national professional organizations. In all three cases it was mentioned that the national program accreditation standards were more rigorous than COE’s institutional standards. On a similar topic, representatives of both faculty and administration mentioned that the

college's COE self-study efforts should have been coordinated with the institution's Commission on Colleges (COC) and Performance Accountability Review (PAR) initiatives regarding, respectively, regional accreditation with SACS and compliance with the Department of Technical and Adult Education's own quality assurance program.

Two administrators stated that preparing for the self-study at Crawford Tech had become "more of an event than a process." Both shared the concern that updating plans, verifying outcomes, and revising key documents should be an ongoing process rather than a rush of activity every five or six years in order to conform to self-study requirements. As one administrator put it, "I don't think we give [the processes] enough respect."

Finally, although a few members of both the faculty and administration mentioned that the recent self-study process was "fully-engaged," "comprehensive," and "involved every person," one vice president stated that a large percentage of the instructional staff was new due to a high turnover rate. This person went on to say that because of this, "not everyone was aware of accreditation requirements" and that these new instructors "have no inkling about accreditation."

Disagreements between faculty and administrators on self-study content

There was very little discussion about disagreements between faculty and administrators on the content of the self-study. Four out of five faculty members interviewed stated that they did not know of any situations where there was any difference of opinion between the two groups on the subject of the self-study reports pertaining to their instructional areas. Three out of five administrators agreed, saying that they, too, could not recall any such disagreements. The two other administrators stated that any such differences were "resolved in the committees" or "hashed out...as we progressed." The one faculty member who indicated that he was aware of

differences of opinion stated that the situation was “resolved along chains of command.” He went on to say that “in most situations the supervisor said, ‘no, this is the way it needs to be,’ and so that’s the way it went.”

Questions pertaining to revisions in the self-study report yielded similar results as the questions about faculty and administration disagreements on content of the report. Three of the five instructors interviewed stated that they were not aware of any revisions; one replied that there were no revisions, and one responded that there were “only a couple of changes dealing with advisory committees.” Two of the instructors admitted that, not only did they not write their program’s self-study reports, they were not even aware who did. Another stated that her program’s report was written by “several people.” Consequently, all three of these individuals were not aware if any revisions had been made to the document.

While only one of the administrators interviewed indicated that he was not familiar with revisions to the self-study, the other four indicated that, as administrators, they had the prerogative to make changes to the self-study draft as they saw fit. As one person put it, “I was part of the editing committee and the final reading committee; if I wasn’t happy with what was written, then I rewrote it.” Another stated, “If we [administrators] bear the responsibility [of the self-study report], then it was our initiative and we were the ones who said, ‘This is the way it will be.’” A third administrator explained that “there were some instances when I felt the standards were not addressed correctly, when it wasn’t as good of a description of our institution as it should have been. So then I had to go back and spend time rewriting the self-study and then giving it back to the instructors and saying, ‘This is what you wrote, these are the corrections, and I just felt like you needed to know.’” The administrator went on to add that “there was no negative reaction to my revisions from the people who originally wrote it.”

Faculty and administrator roles in the self-study process

There was general agreement between faculty and administrators on the issue of instructor and staff roles in the self-study process. While administrators indicated that the self-study process should “involve all faculty and staff” in order to generate “a cross section of input” where each person should “contribute in areas he knows best,” instructors were explicit in stating, unanimously, that faculty should be responsible for reporting on program areas. The faculty went on to state overwhelmingly that administration should “pull [the self-study] together” and should report on “the administrative tasks” of the college. One instructor stated that “administration sees the big picture and knows what the general direction is supposed to be” and the “faculty’s role is to give the details.” There were comments from two instructors that administration should keep track of the information from state agencies that is generally required for the self-study report. As one faculty member put it, “Administration should keep track of this information, especially since instructors are limited in their time.”

One administrator stated that the “large burden [for the self-study report] shouldn’t lie on the shoulders of the administration.” Interestingly, this was the same individual who stated earlier that the administration bears the ultimate responsibility of the self-study report and that it was the administration’s prerogative to make whatever revisions it felt necessary.

Personal values

There was virtually no agreement between the personal values self-prescribed by members of the college’s faculty interviewed for this study and by members of its administration. Instructors described their personal values as anything from pride, honesty, kindness, and being a role model. One faculty member claimed that the value that guides his

work at the college was being “absolutely transparent” in his actions. Another named her organizational skills as her most important value.

While there was little common ground on the topic of personal values among the instructors participating in this study, the opposite was true for the administrators. The first administrator interviewed was the president of the institution. When the subject of personal values was mentioned, he replied that the college “just went through the process of defining our institutional values.” Those values, he said, were summarized by the word “EXCITE” which, he explained, stands for “excellent quality, customer service, integrity, teamwork, and everyone is respected.” A second administrator responded to the values question by saying that his personal values were equal to the college’s new institutional values called “EXCITE” which stands for “cooperation, excellence, respecting others and teamwork.” A third administrator also mentioned that his values were expressed by “EXCITE” and that it means “integrity, quality and customer service.” The fourth and fifth administrators interviewed stated that their values were, respectively, “accuracy and teamwork” and “to make our president look good.”

Summary

Members of Crawford Technical College’s faculty and administration interviewed for this study shared similar perspectives of the institution’s recent self-study process in a number of areas. They both generally agreed that the principle value of accreditation is public recognition that minimum educational standards have been met. Members of the administration also indicated that accreditation opens the door for federal financial aid and facilitates course transfer to other institutions. Faculty and administrators were also in general agreement that institutional improvement was the primary outcome desired of the accreditation self-study effort. Two

administrators also mentioned the importance of the self-study report as significant in documenting the college's past and current operations.

Instructors and administrators were consistent in their perception that the recent self-study process was time-consuming, yet having a positive impact on the school. There was also a concern by some in both groups that the COE self-study efforts should be coordinated with COC, PAR and individual program accreditation initiatives. Finally, where some instructors and administrators saw the recent self-study process as “a pleasant experience” where “everything went smoothly,” others in both groups remembered that process as “a pain in the neck” with “a lot of overkill in preparation.”

There was virtually unanimous agreement between faculty and administration that there were no differences of opinion or disagreements on self-study content. Similarly, there was general agreement between the two groups that there was not a problem with revisions of draft sections of the self-study report. In this last case, however, it was a situation where faculty members were not all aware of who wrote their own programs' portion of the self-study. Furthermore, administrators stated that it was their prerogative to make whatever changes to the drafts that they saw fit. Since the individual components of the self-study report were prepared by standing committees, the issue of disagreements between faculty, report author, and steering committee was murky at best. The same was true on the issue of revisions to the report; most faculty members were not aware of any revisions because they were not privy to the original drafts that were presented to the steering committee.

Both faculty members and administrators interviewed agreed that the self-study report should involve every member of the college community. Instructors, however, pointed out that it

was important for them to have input specifically in the areas of educational programs as that represented their sphere of expertise.

It was on the issue of personal values where there was virtually no agreement between members of the college's faculty and its administration. The five instructors interviewed presented a list of assorted and diverse values that showed no cohesion between one and another. The administrators, however, showed considerable consistency in their declared values in that three out of the five interviewed referred to the college's new set of institutional values as representative of their own. Two administrators, however, did not recall the full complement of five values that make up the institution's new core values. Two other administrators indicated altogether different values that guide their work at the college.

The Cross-Case Analysis

Organization for the Self-Study Report

The self-study process at all three technical colleges participating in this study was similarly organized in that each relied on committees to coordinate the preparation of the self-study report. Anderson Technical College and Bradley Technical College used "ad hoc" committees specifically organized for the self-study initiative. There was a committee assigned to each of the ten accreditation standards. There were committees devoted to preparing a review of the college's community and institution characteristics as well as its individual educational programs. Finally, there were committees devoted to activities involved in the upcoming accreditation team visit such as exhibit preparation and hospitality planning. The COE *Self-Study Manual* indicates that "the support of all institutional personnel" is one of the keys to a successful self-evaluation (p. 1). The manual also states that the self-study process "must have the total commitment from the institution's governing body, administration, and every member

of the staff” (p. 2). Therefore, every full-time employee generally found himself or herself assigned to the committee where his or her position, expertise or work experience can make the best contribution to that particular portion of the self-study report. The chairperson of each standard committee usually sat on the steering committee.

Crawford Technical College chose to utilize for the COE self-study report existing committees that had been formed as a part of the institution’s plan to seek candidate status with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional accrediting agency serving Georgia and that already accredits twelve of the state’s 34 technical colleges. These seven interdisciplinary standing committees were composed of representatives from all three of the college’s campuses and were specifically focused on such issues as instruction, student support services, learning resources, and institutional research. These seven committees were temporarily modified to generate the ten standard committees consistent with the Council on Occupational Education’s recommendations for self-study preparation.

At Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech, draft reports prepared by each standard or program committee were submitted first to the editing committee for a grammar and spelling review. The reports were then submitted to the steering committee which had the responsibility of giving final approval to the individual segments that would collectively comprise the finished self-study report. The steering committee was chaired by the person or persons generally considered to be the overall coordinator of the institution’s self-study process. At Anderson Technical College the Vice President of Student Services held this position. At Bradley Tech there were two faculty co-chairs who led the steering committee under the advisement of the Vice President of Instructional Services.

The reporting system was different at Crawford Technical College where the standards committees submitted their draft reports to a four-person steering committee headed by the Director of Institutional Effectiveness. The steering committee was responsible for assuring that the grammar, spelling and format of the individual reports were correct and consistent. The steering committee, in turn, submitted their approved drafts to a reading committee composed of the vice presidents of the institution. This final committee assured that the content of the report was an accurate reflection of the college's programs and services from "an administrative perspective."

Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech organized their self-study committees and began gathering documents for preparing the report between nine and twelve months prior to the date of the accreditation team visit. Anderson Tech, which suffered what one administrator there referred to as "several false starts," began its self-study preparation in earnest approximately five months prior to the arrival of the visiting team.

Self-Study and Team Visit Perceived as One Event

The research focus for this paper was the accreditation self-study report. My interest was in gathering information about the perceptions of the report held by faculty and administrators at Georgia's state technical colleges. However, while collecting the data through interviews at the three selected colleges it became apparent that many of the study's participants perceived the institutional self-study and the accreditation team visit as one process. On many occasions questions pertaining specifically to the subject's perceptions of the self-study report were answered with responses pertaining to events surrounding the team visit. This was particularly evident at Anderson Technical College and Bradley Technical College where a majority of instructors and roughly half of the administrators interviewed responded to some of the self-

study report questions with references to the recent team visit. At Crawford Technical College this perception was less common.

Value of Accreditation

Faculty and administrators at all three colleges in this study agreed on the concept that institutional accreditation was important as a public mark of distinction signifying that the school was meeting performance benchmarks established by a national accrediting body. Expressed in such terms as “seal of approval,” “stamp of approval” and “public recognition of quality,” instructors and administrators alike believed in the quality-enhancement benefit of accreditation. There was also general agreement between faculty and administrators at all three schools that their colleges gained credibility with the community and peer institutions through COE accreditation. One instructor at Crawford Tech summarized the perceptions of the majority of participants by saying “accreditation gives more value to the school from the perspective of the community.”

Faculty members at Anderson Tech were consistent in also identifying the importance of accreditation in maintaining high educational standards and in identifying and improving areas of weakness within the institution. A statement whose sentiment was repeated by virtually all of the instructors at Anderson Tech was that accreditation permitted one “to know the strengths and weaknesses” of a program and then to “deal with them.” Such a perception was voiced by only one other instructor each at Bradley and Crawford Tech.

In addition to supporting the generally-held perception that accreditation serves as a stamp of approval for the institution, various administrators at Anderson Tech and Crawford Tech mentioned the importance of accreditation in keeping the institution on track with its mission, in awarding federal financial aid, in facilitating course transfer, and in assuring faculty

credentials. These additional benefits of accreditation were generally not mentioned by members of the three colleges' faculty.

Desirable Outcomes of an Institutional Self-Study Report

Institutional improvement was cited by almost all of the faculty and administrators at all three colleges as the primary objective of the self-study report. According to an overwhelming majority of respondents from both the faculty and administration at the three institutions, this improvement would be accomplished by identifying strengths and weaknesses within the institutions' programs and services. The institutional review triggered by the self-study process "makes you look at yourself with an aim to improve," as one instructor at Bradley Tech stated.

Faculty and administrators at Anderson Tech also mentioned that the self-study should confirm that the institution's operations were adhering to accreditation standards. An instructor at Bradley Tech stated that the self-study "may validate concerns faculty has about programs that [he has] been trying to sell to administration." This sentiment was echoed by an instructor at Crawford Tech who said that the self-study "encourages funding" and resource development for those programs where shortcomings may have been discovered as the accreditation report was being prepared.

Administrators at Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech saw the self-study report as an important reference document to record their college's processes and activities. One administrator referred to the self-study report as the "capstone of the school's ongoing operation." Other desirable outcomes of the self-study process that were occasionally cited by members of the colleges' administration include an opportunity to "get departments back to their core missions" and an opportunity to build camaraderie by having faculty and staff from different areas work together on a common project.

The Effectiveness of the Recent Self-Study Process

Perceptions of the effectiveness of the recent self-study process varied among the three institutions in the study. Faculty and administrators at Anderson Tech generally agreed that the process was frustrating and time-consuming, and that it especially infringed upon an instructor's class preparation time. Instructors and administrators also universally agreed that more time was needed for preparing the self-study. Furthermore, faculty and staff members at the college also stated that using another college's recent self-study report as a model was confusing, ineffective and counterproductive. However, the degree of frustration with the self-study process varied between the faculty and administrators at the college.

While both faculty and administrators at Anderson Technical College perceived the self-study process as time-consuming and occasionally frustrating, the faculty was unanimous in stating that the process was poorly managed as well. One instructor referred to it as "the most confusing, ill-managed process that I have ever gone through." False starts, redundant directives, "mountains of paperwork," and reversed decisions all contributed to this perception which was held, in varying degrees, by all instructors interviewed. While they agreed that the process was time-consuming and "occasionally frustrating," members of the administration at Anderson Tech were, however, less derisive and critical of the recent self-study process.

At Bradley Technical College the perceptions of the recent self-study process varied considerably between instructors and administrators. As with Anderson Tech, the faculty at Bradley also saw the process as time-consuming and plagued with "the duplication of a lot of research." They did not, however, share the Anderson Tech faculty's harsh condemnation of the leadership provided for the process. Members of the Bradley Tech faculty did agree with their Anderson Tech colleagues that using another institution's self-study as a model "created

confusion” and only “added work and stress” to an already challenging task. Finally, they also agreed with their Anderson Tech peers that self-study preparations “took away from instructional time.” On the other hand, the administrators at Bradley Tech interviewed for this study perceived the recent self-study process as a “wonderful experience,” a “morale builder,” and a “learning experience.” As one administrator put it, “I can’t tell you anything negative that has come from this process.”

At Crawford Technical College, there were few criticisms of its recent self-study process, and there was little agreement among the faculty or among the administration about particular perceptions of the process. Although a few members on both sides of the organizational chart mentioned that the process was challenging or, as one instructor put it, “never a fun process to go through,” several interview participants stated that the process had “a positive impact on the school” and that “it can help you grow as an institution.” Four out of the five members of the administration interviewed at Crawford Tech were, nonetheless, critical of the perceptions that they believed were generally held at the school concerning the self-study process. One stated that he felt the self-study had “become more of an event than a process.” He clarified this statement by saying that much of the data-gathering and institutional assessment that took place in the months leading up to the publication of the institutional self-study should be taking place as a part of the college’s normal business routine. Another administrator doubted that faculty members at the institution were aware of COE accreditation standards or were prepared to write their program reports in an honest and truthful manner. A third administrator felt that many of the college’s employees perceived the institutional self-study as “a drudgery.” Finally, one administrator stated that she didn’t think the college community gave the self-study “enough respect.”

There were two issues relating to the COE self-study that were mentioned by some representatives of both administration and faculty members at all three institutions. First, several individuals at each college mentioned that the Department of Technical and Adult Education should design a method for coordinating the research and preparation necessary for COE, for the agency's own Performance Accountability Review (PAR) system, for the various national professional accrediting organizations that certify particular programs within each college, and for the Commission of Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The individuals who brought up this issue were critical of the duplication of work involved for those institutions preparing documents and plans to satisfy similar requirements for all of these separate agencies. Secondly, some faculty members at all three colleges mentioned that their program's national professional accrediting or licensing requirements were considerably more rigorous than were the program requirements for COE institutional accreditation.

Finally, in spite of the differences of opinion about their institution's recent self-study process, all faculty and all administrators interviewed for this research study agreed that the self-study document recently produced by their institution presented an accurate depiction of the college's compliance with COE accreditation standards.

Disagreements between Faculty and Administrators on Self-Study Content

For only one of the three colleges studied was there a perception that there were disagreements or differences of opinion between faculty and administration on the content of the institutional self-study report. At Anderson Technical College roughly half of the faculty interviewed stated that there were frequent occasions when such disagreements occurred. One faculty member attributed this situation most often to "problems of interpretation" of the standards between faculty and leadership. The faculty went on to say that when there was a

difference of opinion, management alone decided the outcome of the self-study report. As one instructor put it, “Pretty much the VP made a decision as to what was going to be required...or what we would do.” The administrators at Anderson Tech perceived that there were very few, if any, differences of opinion between those who prepared the different components of the self-study report and members of the self-study steering committee. The few instances when this occurred were likely due to “misinterpretations...of a procedure that we had at the college from one of the other departments.” Two administrators went on to say that in the few instances where this may have occurred, the administration’s perspective on the issue prevailed owing to their “larger vision” of the institution’s operations.

There were frequent revisions of the self-study report at Anderson Technical College. While the faculty perceived these revisions in a negative light, saying that they were “a waste of time” and an area “where we got into trouble,” the administrators saw the revisions as largely due to misinterpretations or the need to clarify the college’s current operating standards.

At Bradley Technical College both faculty and administrators generally agreed that there were no disagreements or differences of opinion surrounding the self-study report that could be recalled. While one instructor stated that such differences of opinion were resolved “by the pecking order,” he went on to say that “administration will listen and is open to recommendations.” Another instructor at Bradley stated that faculty “has autonomy to write their program reports as they see them.” One of the administrators interviewed stated that the “very few incidents” of difference of opinion were resolved through communication and were “usually just a matter of clarification” of an accreditation standard or criterion under consideration. When asked about revisions to the self-study drafts, both faculty and administrators at Bradley Tech

were unanimous in stating that there were either no revisions they could recall, or the few revisions that were requested were strictly a matter of grammar or sentence structure.

As with Bradley Technical College, there was general agreement between faculty and administration at Crawford Tech that there were no differences of opinion about the self-study report between those who prepared the report drafts and those who approved the final version. It must be mentioned here that two of the faculty members at Crawford Tech did not know who wrote their program's supplement for the self-study, and consequently they were not in a position to know if there were any differences of opinion about the report drafts. A third faculty member admitted that the program supplement report was written by several individuals and that she did not see the final version submitted to the steering committee. She, too, was not in a position to be aware of any disagreements about the content of the supplement report for her program area. One faculty member at Crawford did admit that any differences of opinion were "resolved along chains of command" and that in most situations the "supervisor's" opinion prevailed. Two administrators at Crawford Tech stated that where there were any differences of opinion, they were "hashed out...as we progressed" or they were "resolved in the committees."

On the topic of self-study report revisions at Crawford Technical College, four of the five faculty members interviewed stated that they were not aware of any revisions. The fifth instructor said that there were "only a couple of changes dealing with advisory committees." It should be noted, again, that three of the faculty members did not prepare the reports representing their program areas; they would, therefore, not have been aware of any revisions to these reports. While three of the administrators interviewed at Crawford Tech were not aware of any revisions to the drafts of the individual reports comprising the institutional self-study, two of them stated that as administrators at the college and ultimately responsible for its accreditation self-study,

they saw that “it was our initiative” to make whatever changes in the report that they believed to be valid in order to accurately portray the institution’s programs and services.

Faculty and Administrator Roles in the Self-Study Process

There was universal agreement between the faculty and administrators interviewed at all three technical colleges that the accreditation self-study initiative should have faculty preparing the program supplement reports and the administration reporting on institutional services. It was also universally perceived that leadership for the self-study process should be provided by key administration members.

Apart from the unanimous agreement on the role of faculty, there were some minor differences of opinion expressed at each institution on how the administration should carry out its responsibilities in the self-study process. Some faculty members at Anderson Technical College felt that the administration could lighten the self-study preparation load of the instructors by doing much of the repetitious copying and information gathering required of the task. One instructor even mentioned that administration should consider hiring an external team to write the entire report. Even one administrator at Anderson Tech believed that the administration should help relieve some of the self-study “burdens” carried by the faculty.

The self-study “burden” was also an issue with one of the Bradley Technical College instructors who also felt that administration should provide some relief by providing clerical assistance for the faculty. While she agreed with the unanimous perception that the self-study process should involve faculty and administration equally, one administrator at Bradley wished that faculty “could have more buy-in and personal ownership of the self-study process.”

At Crawford Technical College there were comments from two instructors that administration should keep track of the information from state agencies that is generally required

for the self-study report. As one faculty member put it, “Administration should keep track of this information, especially since instructors are limited in their time.” However, according to one administrator at Crawford Tech, the “large burden [of the self-study report] shouldn’t lie on the shoulders of the administration.”

Personal Values

The list of self-proclaimed personal values expressed by the thirty individuals interviewed for this project show few distinctions between members of the faculty and members of the administration, or between personnel at Anderson, Bradley or Crawford Technical Colleges. Honesty, integrity, and good work ethics were the three most commonly cited values among the thirty participants in this study, occurring with more or less equal frequency between faculty and administrators. Several instructors also listed moral character and religious beliefs among their personal values. Supplementing these generally-held values were personal values that relate in some way to the interview participant’s specific job responsibilities. For example, faculty members mentioned that they were guided in their work by such values as organizational skills, putting out the best students, professionalism, good relations with students, a good reputation, and being a role model. Members of the administration interviewed at Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech cited such work-related values as open communication, fairness, serving students, accountability, adhering to rules, confidentiality, and an open-door policy.

Unlike the responses at the other two institutions studied, members of the administration at Crawford Technical College showed a certain level of consistency in their remarks about their personal values. When asked about the values that guide his work at the college, the president of Crawford Tech stated that the college had just completed the process of defining its core institutional values. These values were summarized in the word “EXCITE” which, he explained,

stands for “excellent quality, customer service, integrity, teamwork, and everyone is respected.” When asked the same question, a second administrator responded that his personal values were identical to the institution’s newly-defined values called “EXCITE” which stands for “integrity, quality and customer service.” Still a third administrator mentioned that her values were expressed in the college’s new set of core values called “EXCITE” and which stands for “cooperation, excellence, respecting others, and teamwork.” The fourth administrator interviewed stated that her personal values were “accuracy and teamwork,” while the fifth administrator to be interviewed simply stated that her one single value was to “make our president look good.”

Summary

The self-study process at all three technical colleges participating in this study was similarly organized in that each relied on committees to coordinate the preparation of the self-study report. While Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech used “ad hoc” committees for this purpose, Crawford Technical College temporarily reorganized existing interdisciplinary standing committees to achieve this task. At Anderson and Bradley Techs, the committees submitted their report drafts to an editing committee which checked the reports for grammar, spelling and continuity. From there the reports went to the steering committee which was composed of the chairpersons from each of the standards committees. The steering committee was responsible for reviewing and approving the final version of the self-study report. At Crawford Tech, the committees submitted their draft reports to a four-person steering committee that reviewed the reports for grammar, spelling and continuity. This steering committee then forwarded the drafts to a reading committee composed of the vice presidents of the college. The reading committee

assured that the final self-study document portrayed the institution's programs and services in a manner consistent with "an administrative perspective" of the school's operations.

Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech began their respective self-study process between nine and twelve months prior to the accreditation team visit. Anderson Tech began its self-study preparation in earnest approximately five months prior to the arrival of the visiting team. Faculty and administrators at Anderson Tech stated that they should have started their self-study preparations earlier.

At both Anderson Technical College and Bradley Technical College questions to interview participants relating specifically to the institutional self-study were often answered with responses relating to the accreditation team visit. This was especially the case with the instructors interviewed at both of these colleges. At Crawford Technical College this phenomenon was less apparent.

Faculty and administrators at all three colleges studied agreed on the concept that institutional accreditation was important as a public mark of distinction signifying that the school was meeting performance benchmarks established by a national accrediting body. There was also general agreement between faculty and administration at all three schools that their colleges gained credibility with the community and peer institutions through COE accreditation. There were numerous secondary benefits to accreditation that were cited by both faculty and administrators at all three institutions. Included among these were maintaining high educational standards, awarding federal financial aid, facilitating course transfer, assuring faculty credentials, and keeping the institution on track with its core mission.

Institutional improvement was cited by almost all of the faculty and administrators at all three colleges studied as the primary desirable outcome of the self-study report. It was also

widely perceived that this improvement would be accomplished by identifying strengths and weaknesses within the institutions' programs and services and by addressing the weaknesses identified. At Anderson Tech there was a common perception among both faculty and administrators that the self-study process should confirm that the institution was adhering to established accreditation standards. Two instructors at different institutions mentioned the self-study process as a means to document and validate a program's need for additional resources. Administrators at Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech also perceived the self-study to be an important reference source to document the institution's ongoing activities.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of the recent self-study process varied among the three institutions in this study. Faculty and administration at Anderson Tech generally agreed that the process was frustrating and time-consuming, and that it infringed upon an instructor's class preparation time. In addition, the instructors at Anderson Tech were harshly critical of the leadership of the recent self-study process. The administrators at Anderson were less critical of the process. Both groups of respondents agreed that more time should have been allowed to complete the self-study report.

At Bradley Technical College the perceptions of the recent self-study process varied considerably between faculty and administrators. Whereas the instructors at Bradley generally viewed the process as time-consuming and plagued with much duplication of effort, the administrators viewed the recent self-study process as a "wonderful experience" and a "morale builder."

Several respondents at both Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech stated that using another institution's recent self-study report as a model for their own was ineffective. They claimed it only added confusion and additional work and stress to the task.

At Crawford Technical College there were few criticisms of its recent self-study process, and there was little agreement among the faculty or among the administrators about particular perceptions of the process. Although a few members of both the faculty and administration mentioned that the process was challenging, several interview participants stated that it had a positive impact on the school. However, most of the administrators at Crawford were critical of the perceptions that they believed were generally held at the school concerning the self-study process. Most believed that the self-study process was perceived negatively by most of the institutional community.

In spite of the differences of opinion about their institution's recent self-study process, all faculty and all administrators interviewed for this research study agreed that the self-study document recently produced by their institutions presented an accurate depiction of the college's compliance with COE accreditation standards.

For only one of the three colleges studied was there a perception of disagreements or differences of opinion between faculty and administration on the content of the institutional self-study report. At Anderson Tech roughly half of the faculty interviewed stated that there were frequent occasions when such disagreements occurred. The administrators at Anderson perceived that there were few, if any, such occurrences. At both Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech, the general perception among both faculty and administration was that there were few, if any, situations where faculty and administrators disagreed on self-study content. Administrators interviewed at both Anderson and Crawford Technical Colleges believed that when there were differences of opinion about content of the self-study report, it was the prerogative of administration to make the final determination.

There was agreement between faculty and administrators interviewed at all three technical colleges that the accreditation self-study initiative should have faculty preparing the program supplement reports and the administration reporting on institutional services. It was also universally perceived that leadership for the self-study process should be provided by key administrators.

The list of self-proclaimed personal values expressed by the thirty individuals interviewed for this project showed few distinctions between members of the faculty and members of the administration, or between personnel at Anderson, Bradley or Crawford Technical Colleges. Honesty, integrity, and good work ethics were the three most commonly cited values among the thirty respondents in this study, occurring with more or less equal frequency between faculty and administration. In addition to these generally-held values were personal values or desirable traits that related in some way to the interview participant's specific job responsibilities. Unlike the responses at the two other institutions studied, members of the administration at Crawford Tech were consistent in stating that their personal values were identical to the newly-minted institutional core values established for the college. However, the three administrators out of five who held this perception were inconsistent in their recollection of these values.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of the COE accreditation self-study held by faculty and administrators in Georgia's technical colleges. The study was also intended to examine the influence that these perceptions may have on the institutional self-study report prepared as a part of the college's accreditation process with the Council on Occupational Education. First, the study sought to determine how faculty and administration perceive the self-study in three technical colleges in Georgia. The second purpose of the study was to identify and describe areas of common and differing perceptions of the self-study at these three institutions. Special interest was placed on the personal values underlying these perceptions. The final purpose of the study was to examine if and how these perceptions influenced the institution's self-study report.

This study was designed as a qualitative comparative multiple case study examining the phenomenon of self-study perceptions at three technical colleges. The three institutions chosen for this study met pre-determined criteria relating to their accreditation status with COE. The actual names of the three institutions participating in this study were changed for this report. The primary method of data collection for this study was confidential one-on-one tape recorded interviews between the researcher and a purposefully-selected group of five faculty members and five administrators at each institution. A standard interview protocol was used for all thirty interviews. Data from transcripts resulting from the interviews were analyzed first as individual

case studies focusing on each institution and then as a cross-case study encompassing all three colleges.

Categories of Self-Study Perceptions

The thirty transcripts generated in the course of this research study yielded almost one thousand discernible perceptions of the institutional self-study and the COE accreditation process. However, a protracted analysis of transcript data revealed that all the respondents' perceptions fell into one of five topical categories:

1. The value of accreditation
2. Desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report
3. The effectiveness of the institution's recent self-study process
4. Disagreements between faculty and administrators on self-study content
5. Faculty and administrator roles in the self-study process

In addition to these categories of perception, the issue of personal values was important to this research study since its theoretical framework is based on the role of values in organizational development. Values, therefore, became the sixth significant category of analysis.

The findings reflecting these six topics are restated and analyzed below, and conclusions are drawn from these findings. This analysis addresses the fundamental research questions of this study and reveals the following: the extent to which perceptions about the self-study differ between faculty and administrators; the defining characteristics of these perceptions; the personal values underlying these perceptions; and the influence of these perceptions on the self-study report. References to conclusions of previous research studies on these or similar topics are also included. This section is followed by a discussion of implications and recommendations that may be derived from these conclusions.

The Value of Accreditation

Findings

Faculty and administrators at all three technical colleges included in this study unanimously agreed that institutional accreditation had a positive impact on the college. Interview participants from both the colleges' faculty and administration overwhelmingly perceived that accreditation enhanced the value of the institution and the education one received there. Perceived by instructors and administrators alike as a "stamp of approval," accreditation by COE was also believed to enhance the credibility of the institution both within the community and among other education institutions. While some faculty members and administrators also perceived additional benefits resulting from institutional accreditation, these added values were most often a reflection of the respondent's specific job responsibilities or scope of activity within the college.

Conclusions

There was no difference in perception about the core value of institutional accreditation among members of the three colleges' faculty and administration. Both groups believed that accreditation was of value to the institution and enhanced the image and perceived quality of their respective colleges.

Studies by Kells and Parrish (1986) revealed that accreditation was widely held to be a desirable goal unto itself—one that endowed a mantle of quality on an institution's programs and services. Comments such as these were later echoed in studies by Eaton (1999) and McMurtrie (2000) who found that the public placed a certain amount of confidence in those institutions that were accredited, even though people were not sure of the process required for gaining that distinction.

These findings also reflect those of Farrow's (1975) study of SACS-accredited junior colleges in Alabama that concluded that accreditation is perceived by both faculty and administrators to be a positive influence on the institution. This general positive attitude towards accreditation, according to conclusions drawn by Walker (1993), may have resulted from a number of variables that were present in the three Georgia technical colleges included in this study. Specifically, these variables were: a recent self-study and accreditation visit; a high level of support from the president; previous experience in the self-study process; and in-service training relating to the self-study.

Desirable Outcomes of an Institutional Self-Study Report

Findings

Institutional improvement was cited by almost all of the faculty and administrators at all three technical colleges as the primary objective of the self-study report. According to an overwhelming majority of respondents from both the faculty and administration at the three institutions, this improvement would be accomplished by identifying and addressing weaknesses within the institutions' programs and services that became apparent through the process of preparing the self-study report. A significant number of respondents perceived the self-study report and accreditation team visit as one process. Consequently, they had difficulty distinguishing desirable outcomes of the self-study report from desirable outcomes of the accreditation visit and the team report that results from this visit. Nevertheless, this perception was held by only slightly more faculty members than administrators and, therefore, does not represent a significant divergence of perception among the two groups. Only three out of the fifteen faculty members interviewed indicated that they perceived the self-study report as a means of justifying the acquisition of new instructional resources.

Conclusions

There was no difference of perception about the desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study report among members of the technical college faculty and administration. Both groups perceived that institutional improvement was the primary desirable outcome of the self-study report.

This conclusion is consistent with Brown's (2004) contention that the self-study and accreditation processes should result in institutional improvement and innovation. Other researchers (Barker & Smith, 1998; Harvey, 2004) also agreed that the main objective of the accreditation self-study was to identify specific areas needing improvement and develop those strategies needed to bring about this improvement.

However, the above conclusion appears to run contrary to conclusions drawn by Yarbrough (1983) who found that different groups within the college community valued different variables surrounding the self-study. In her study, presidents, administrators and faculty members, for example, did not agree on the degree to which such variables as "useful reports" and "problem-solving" influenced one's perception of the self-study process. In the study just completed all three of these groups were represented in the interview sample, and all shared the perception that institutional improvement was the most desirable outcome of the self-study process. The two variables mentioned above that were so significant in the Yarbrough study were also frequently cited in this current study by representatives of both faculty and administration as being important factors in the success of the institutional self-study. Finally, Harris (1983) also found that improved institutional effectiveness resulted from, among other things, the quality of the self-study report.

The Effectiveness of the Institution's Recent Self-Study Process

Findings

Perceptions about the effectiveness of their institution's recent self-study process varied remarkably between members of an institution's faculty and its administration, as well as between one institution and another. At Anderson Technical College both faculty and administrators perceived that their self-study process was frustrating, time-consuming, and disruptive to one's professional routine. Faculty members, however, were considerably more critical of the process and its leadership than were members of Anderson Tech's administration. While faculty members at Bradley Tech perceived that the recent self-study process was time-consuming and plagued by "busywork," the administrators interviewed at that school perceived that the process was a morale-builder and, overall, a "wonderful experience." Faculty members at Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech also resented administration's attempts to use another school's self-study report as a template for their own. Finally, at Crawford Technical College there was little agreement between either faculty members or administrators about their recent self-study process. Instructors had neither pointedly negative perceptions of the process, nor any particular praise for it either. However, while they themselves had general praise for the recent self-study process, most of the administrators interviewed perceived that the faculty at Crawford Tech had decidedly negative views of the process.

Conclusions

Faculty and administrators had different perceptions of their institution's recent self-study process. Instructors tended to view the process in a negative light and were critical of the time-consuming and disruptive activities involved in preparing the self-study report. They also resented the implication that they needed to consult another institution's self-study report in

order to succeed with their own. Administrators perceived the self-study process more positively and focused on the beneficial results that arose from the effort.

The divergence between faculty and administrator perceptions on the topic of the effectiveness of the school's recent self-study process was consistent with findings by Clark (1989) and Alstete (2004) who both described a basic divergence of cultures that drives these different perceptions. Clark found that administration's focus on productivity and efficiency was often at odds with faculty's focus on peer consensus and departmental self-governance. This disparity is alluded to in studies done by Kells and Kirkwood (1979) and Kells and Parrish (1986) who determined that successful self-study initiatives shared a number of common variables including internal motivation, inclusive decision making, and effective management. When one or more of these variables is absent from the process, they concluded, success in the self-study process is jeopardized. Faculty members at Anderson Technical College perceived that their school's recent self-study efforts were poorly managed and lacked involvement by all employees of the school. They also felt that many self-study decisions were handed down by management rather than decided by group decision-making. Consequently, their perceptions of the self-study process were negative and harshly critical. Although instructors at Bradley Technical College thought highly of the leadership of the self-study process and believed that their input was a valued component of decisions regarding the self-study report, they, nonetheless, objected to the disruption that was imposed upon them by the necessity of doing a self-study. Their perceptions of Bradley Tech's recent self-study process, while not as vehemently critical as at Anderson Tech, were, nonetheless, somewhat negative.

Walker's (1993) study continued the previous research done by Kells, Kirkwood, and Parrish cited above. One of the nine factors that she found to be significant in creating a positive

attitude toward accreditation is release time from one's daily routine to work on activities involved in the self-study and team visit preparations. The lack of this release time was frequently cited by faculty members at both Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech and may have negatively influenced their perceptions of the self-study process.

Harris (1983) found an inverse relationship between hardship imposed by the self-study process and the effectiveness of that process to bring about institutional improvement. The fact that instructors perceived the process to be burdensome, thereby generating negative perceptions of the process, supported Harris's conclusions.

Faculty members at Crawford Technical College did not share the same degree of emotion—positively or negatively—about their school's recent self-study process as was found at the other two colleges. This may have been due largely to the fact that their daily routine was less disrupted by the demands of preparing the self-study report. Being a large institution with over 150 full-time instructors (compared to 28 at Anderson Tech and 40 at Bradley Tech), the amount of effort required by each Crawford Tech faculty member to contribute to the self-study process was minimal. Two of the faculty members interviewed did not even know who wrote their instructional program's report, and a third contributed only a small portion of her program's written analysis. Because they were far removed from the variables cited by Kells, Kirkwood, Parrish, Harris and Walker above, their perceptions of the self-study process were fairly general and benign.

Administrators' perceptions of their schools' recent self-study process were on the whole more positive than those of the faculty members. The exception to this is Anderson Tech which experienced a change in leadership of the steering committee. This led to several "false starts" of the self-study effort which, in turn, resulted in much frustration on the parts of both faculty and

administrators. The administrators interviewed at Bradley Tech and Crawford Tech were largely complimentary of their respective self-study initiatives. Much of this positive perception may have been due to the fact that data gathering, task delegating, and report writing, all of which are involved in self-study preparation, are routine activities of institutional assessment—a responsibility traditionally assumed by a school’s administration (Astin, 1993; Ryan, 1993). Consequently, self-study assignments that an instructor may consider to be outside his or her immediate job responsibility would be perceived by administrators as routine tasks. This concept was not lost on a number of faculty members at Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech who complained that much of their “busy work” was information-gathering that they felt was work that should have been done by the school’s administration.

Disagreements between Faculty and Administrators on Self-Study Content

Findings

For only one of the three colleges included in this study was there a perception of disagreements or differences of opinion between faculty and administrators on the content of the accreditation self-study report. At Anderson Technical College roughly half of the faculty interviewed stated that there were frequent occasions when such disagreements occurred. One instructor attributed these disagreements to “problems of interpretation” of the standards. These disagreements were most often settled with a unilateral decision made by a member of the college’s administration. Perhaps not surprisingly, faculty members interviewed at Anderson Tech also perceived that administration made frequent revisions to the instructors’ self-study draft reports. The administrators interviewed at Anderson Tech did not disagree with the instructors’ perceptions on this subject. The campus managers perceived that the main reason for these differences of opinion was misinterpretation of college procedures or misunderstanding of

COE standards on the part of instructors or support staff. These administrators also contended that their “larger vision” of the institution’s operations gave them a perspective that faculty or staff members may lack and that most of the self-study revisions reflected this leadership perspective.

Faculty and administrators at Bradley Tech agreed that there were no differences of opinion surrounding the self-study report between those who wrote the report drafts—mostly instructors and support staff—and those who were responsible for approving the final report—members of the college’s administration. Respondents from Bradley Tech also generally agreed that there were only minor revisions that were requested of those who wrote the report drafts, and that these revisions were largely grammatical in nature and not content-related. Both faculty and administrators at Bradley Tech praised the leadership of the self-study efforts at the college. Instructors and administrators alike perceived a high degree of collaboration between members of the school’s faculty and administration during the self-study process.

While the instructors interviewed at Crawford Technical College perceived that there were no disagreements over self-study content with the administration, several administrators mentioned that on occasion they found it necessary to revise the draft reports so that they would be a more accurate reflection of the school’s operations as these administrators perceived it. Most of the faculty members interviewed were not aware of these revisions because they were not directly involved in the preparation of the self-study draft reports.

Conclusions

Faculty and administrators held different perceptions about disagreements on the self-study report in situations where the self-study process was also perceived by faculty to be poorly managed and rushed, and/or where the administrators leading the process perceived their

opinions on the institution's operations to be a more accurate depiction of the college. These latter perceptions held by administrators directly influenced the outcome of the self-study report. In cases where the administration perceived their attitudes and opinions of the institution's operations to be more informed and accurate than those of instructors or support staff, and where the administrators revised the self-study report to reflect their attitudes and opinions, the report itself became a reflection of the administration's perspective of the school's operations.

There were very few, if any, disagreements or differences of opinion on the self-study report content in those colleges where the faculty believed the self-study process to be well managed and fair, and where the administration appeared to value the input of instructors and support staff in the preparation of the self-study report.

Previous studies by Yarbrough (1983), Harris (1983) and Walker (1993) found that positive perceptions of accreditation and the self-study were enhanced by well-organized, timely, and inclusive processes. Where the self-study or accreditation initiatives were perceived to be disorganized, lacking in cooperative effort, and poorly scheduled, perceptions on the process were negative. The current study involving Georgia's three technical colleges supported these previous conclusions, particularly on the issue of perceived differences of opinion of self-study content.

One of the challenges found by Dill and Massy (1996) in their studies of the self-study process was what they called a "resistance to collegial interaction" around issues of educational quality (p. 19). As Kells (1995) and Alstete (2004) point out, the institutional self-study is a rare instance in academia where administrators, faculty, and support staff are charged by their accrediting agency with collaborating on a document designed to portray the on-going operations of the institution and to assess its level of educational quality with respect to accreditation

standards. Such collaboration is a challenge, some researchers find, where administrators were more intent on using the self-study to verify that institutional systems currently in place are operating according to accreditation standards, but where instructors were focused on showing how there was room for improvement and innovation in their educational programs (Brown, 2004). Events at Anderson Technical College and Crawford Technical College illustrated these two different perspectives and how these perspectives influenced the self-study report.

Faculty and Administrator Roles in the Self-Study Process

Findings

There was agreement between the faculty and administrators interviewed at all three technical colleges that the accreditation self-study initiative should have faculty preparing the program supplement reports and the administration reporting on institutional services. It was also universally perceived that leadership for the self-study process should be provided by key members of the administration. Faculty members at two of the three institutions perceived that preparation for the self-study report was more of a burden on their work agenda than it was for members of the administration. However, faculty members interviewed at the largest institution, Crawford Technical College, experienced minimal disruption of their daily routine caused by their self-study assignments; this was due to the fact that most of the work on their program's self-study report was prepared by others.

Conclusions

Faculty and administration perceptions did not differ on the principle that an institution's self-study initiative should involve the participation of all constituencies of the college community. Both groups also shared the same perception that faculty members should assess and report on the educational programs offered at the school and that administrators should assess

and report on the institution's services and support programs. Finally, both groups agreed that the self-study process should be directed by a key member of the college's administration. Faculty members generally agreed that the responsibilities surrounding preparation of the self-study report are a burdensome disruption of their instructional duties.

Several previous studies supported these conclusions. In Yarbrough's (1983) study it was found that the self-study steering committee believed that full faculty and staff participation in the self-study process was essential to the success of the initiative. School presidents, administrators and faculty, however, did not share this perception, but found other variables to be more significant to self-study success. Harris (1983) found that commitment from the institutional leader was significant to a successful self-study. Similarly, Walker's (1993) study found that a strong level of support from the school president was one of nine factors that were essential in generating a positive attitude toward accreditation. In their studies of self-study processes, Kells and Kirkwood (1979) and Kells and Parrish (1986) also concluded that representation of all members of the school community and top leader support were two of the essential variables to a successful self-study report.

The significant role that instructors play in the assessment of their own programs of study for accreditation purposes was described by El-Khawas (1983) who found that faculty members played "the primary role in defining and interpreting educational purposes and standards" (p. 59). Brown (2004) agreed, stating that "only those who design and deliver programmes and assess and accredit students are in a position to assure...the quality of those programmes and qualifications" (p. 3).

Personal Values

Findings

The list of self-described personal values mentioned by the fifteen faculty members participating in this study were virtually indistinguishable from those listed by the fifteen administrators included in the research. Whether these individuals worked at Anderson Technical College, Bradley Technical College or Crawford Technical College, both instructors and administrators alike frequently cited the values of honesty, integrity, and good work ethics. After these three general values, the personal values most often cited by either group were those that related in some way to specific job responsibilities. Instructors, for example, mentioned organizational skills, good relations with students, and being a role model as examples of their personal values. For their part, administrators listed open communication, fairness, serving students, accountability, adhering to rules, confidentiality, and an open-door policy as personal values guiding their work.

Although the instructors at Crawford Technical College cited personal values that were similar to those mentioned by faculty or administrators at both Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech, the administrators at Crawford Tech referred to the institution's newly minted set of core values as identical to their own personal values. However, not all the administrators at Crawford Tech correctly recalled this new set of values.

Conclusions

Whether they were employed as administrators or faculty members, the technical college personnel included in this study appeared to share a common set of personal values that included honesty, integrity and good work ethics. These respondents also identified themselves with values and behaviors that were associated with their individual work roles within the institution.

There was virtually no distinctive set of personal values that comprehensively identified either faculty members or members of the administration.

Administrators at the largest institution included in this study tended to respond to the question of personal values with statements that reflected the college's new official set of institutional values, rather than individual personal values. It, therefore, appeared that adhering to a uniform set of core values specifically identified with the institution was desirable for the administration at Crawford Technical College.

The question of personal values was of considerable significance for this study, whose theoretical framework is found in the Motivational System Model developed by Hultman and Gellermann (2002). According to this model, an organization can successfully achieve its mission if there is a compatibility or "alignment" of values between the individuals, teams and departments that comprise the organization (p. 15). In an organization where the values of workers and leaders are not aligned, the successful achievement of organizational goals could be jeopardized. Using the example of perceptions of the institutional self-study, if faculty and administrator values are not compatible, the resulting self-study report may not be an accurate depiction of the programs and services offered by an institution.

The results of this study found a high degree of alignment between members of the colleges' faculty and administrators. Faculty values were not perceived to be significantly different from the values expressed by members of the administration. Similarly, administrators' values showed no pattern of delineation from faculty values. This compatibility may have been due to three significant factors. First, two of the three institutions studied for this report were small enough for frequent interaction between members of the colleges' faculty and administration, and, consequently, there may have been few barriers that limit communication

between administrators and instructors. Second, many of the administrators interviewed for this study had been on a school's faculty at one time or another in their past. As a result, many administrators continued to proclaim personal values that may have been developed during their days in the classroom. Finally, the institutions included in this study were technical colleges whose programs are occupational in nature. Although the philosophical differences between faculty and administrators described by Clark (1989) and Alstete (2004) may be typical of liberal arts colleges or research universities where faculty maintains a high degree of autonomy and independence, the technical colleges comprising Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education did not appear in this study to be typical higher education institutions. For this reason, there may have been no distinct sets of faculty or administrator values at Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech that are typical of values found among faculty or administrators in other higher education communities.

However, the administrators at Crawford Technical College provided responses to the question of personal values that deserved special attention. Although three of the five administrators interviewed stated that their personal values were the same as the recently articulated institutional values for the college, only one person—the college president—correctly named all five values that comprise the school's new official set of values: excellent quality, customer service, integrity, teamwork, and respect for one another. The other two administrators correctly named only two or three of the five values. These three individuals, however, gave the impression that their personal values—the focus of the interview question—had been replaced by values that had been officially determined to be representative of the institution.

Perhaps this finding should not have been unexpected. As one of the largest institutions operating with the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, Crawford Technical

College appeared to be a highly bureaucratic and regimented organization. Unlike the situation found at the other two colleges in this study, the self-study process at Crawford Tech appeared to entail minimum disruption of the regular routine of faculty and administrators. No special committees were formed to prepare portions of the self-study report as happened at Anderson Tech and Bradley Tech. Standing committees at Crawford Tech were only slightly modified to address the needs of the COE self-study. As was mentioned earlier, several faculty members and one administrator did not know of any revisions to their sections of the self-study report because they were far removed from the preparation of the report drafts. Four of the five administrators interviewed stated that because they believed the self-study report to be administration's responsibility, they did not hesitate to revise the draft reports in order to describe the college as they saw fit. This situation is reflective of Bender's (1983) findings in his research on higher education: the values that prevailed in the institution were those of the ultimate decision-makers. Just as the values espoused by representatives of its administration reflected those that were officially assigned to the college, the self-study report prepared by Crawford Technical College specifically reflected the perceptions of the administration. Therefore, it was concluded that organizational practices at Crawford Technical College reflected the values of its top managers in what Hofstede (1998) referred to as the "hierarchy of esteem" (p. 8). In this example, the examination of cultural values held by members of the Crawford Tech administration appeared to be no different from those held at the colleges and universities included in studies conducted by Clark (1989) and Alstete (2004). Specifically, this administrative culture elevated the values of efficiency and accountability over those of collaboration and faculty self-reliance.

One of the factors supporting the execution of this study was the fact that the existing research on postsecondary accreditation omits virtually any reference to occupational institutions

or technical colleges. The mission, organizational structure, curricula and personnel credentials for technical colleges are often quite different from those of traditional colleges and universities and even from traditional junior and community colleges. For this reason, I was interested in discovering whether the outcomes resulting from this study were significantly different from the outcomes of studies involving typical four-year colleges. Although the two smaller institutions included in this study revealed no discernable differences between the personal values held by their faculty and administrators—a finding that contradicts the conclusions drawn by Clark (1989), Hofstede (1989), Trice and Beyer (1993), and Alstete (2004)—the overall findings resulting from this research were similar to those discovered by both education and behavior researchers. Like their four-year college counterparts, faculty and administrators in the three Georgia technical colleges perceived that the self-study narrative is a written blueprint for institutional improvement (Greenberg, 2001); requires certain organizational and operational factors to assure success (Kells & Kirkwood, 1979); and relies on the input and expertise of appropriate instructional and administrative personnel (Kells, 1995; Brown, 2004). Furthermore, the technical college self-study experience was also consistent with the college and university experience in that collaboration between faculty and administrators was a challenge (Martin, Manning & Ramaley, 2001); conflicting agendas arose in the process (Dill & Massy, 1996; Newton, 2000); and administration's vested interests often prevailed in the final version of the self-study document (Bender, 1983).

Not only did it appear that the findings from this current study were largely consistent with those of traditional four-year colleges, but it also appeared that the findings from the technical college research were consistent with those from junior and community colleges research as well. Specifically, the past and current studies found no significant differences

between faculty and administrator perceptions of accreditation (Young, 1973; Walker, 1993); similar perceptions on the part of faculty and administrators on key success factors for the accreditation process (Yarbrough, 1983); and similar factors that influenced the success of the self-study component in the accreditation process (Harris, 1983). All of these studies yielded findings for community and junior colleges that reflected outcomes of the Georgia technical college study.

Implications

Research done by educators has indicated that collaboration between members of a school's faculty and its administrators is often fraught with problems (Glidden, 1983; Kells, 1995; Alstete, 2004). These problems are often exacerbated during the self-study process as the institution attempts to describe issues of educational quality from multiple perspectives (Dill & Massy, 1996; Newton, 2000; Martin, Manning & Ramaley, 2001). Similarly, organizational development theorists have determined that different levels within the organizational hierarchy may possess different values—a phenomenon which may impede the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Trice & Beyer, 1993; Hultman & Gellermann, 2002). In addition to the above-mentioned research, anecdotal accounts gathered by the researcher have also suggested that these two groups may perceive educational quality and assessment from different perspectives.

This research project was intended to build on these theoretical foundations by examining the perceptions and values held by members of the faculty and administration at three technical colleges in Georgia. This study has attempted to address these perceptions by focusing on the phenomenon of the accreditation self-study and by examining the degree to which the personal values of those who participate in the self-study process are compatible and aligned.

While the data suggested that there was little difference in the self-study perceptions between faculty and administrators at all three technical colleges in this study, it would be erroneous to conclude that each institution represented a set of similar self-study practices and values. I discovered that organizational culture and values did indeed influence perceptions of the accreditation self-study. However, the issue of culture and values was not defined in terms of faculty members on one side of the divide and administrators on the other as described by Martin, Manning and Ramaley (2001). Significant to the study were the issues of institutional culture and institutional values displayed during the time of the self-study preparation.

One Technical College System—Three Distinct Cases

The preponderance of negative perceptions of the self-study effort at Anderson Technical College was the result of a poorly managed process with too little time to prepare an adequate self-study report. Due to mid-stream changes in the self-study leadership and the lack of effective group decision-making, the institution exhibited a culture of disorganization and disunity. Institutional values witnessed during this time were expediency and exclusion.

Research findings from Bradford Technical College showed the highest degree of agreement between members of the school's faculty and administration. Members of the college's faculty often commented on how well the administration listened to the concerns of the instructional staff. There was also praise from the administration on the self-study efforts of faculty members, two of whom chaired the self-study steering committee. Bradley Technical College displayed a culture of unity and the respect of one's professional judgment during the self-study process. Values apparent to its faculty and administration during this time were inclusion and mutual support.

Because of its size and organizational structure, Crawford Technical College's self-study experience was remarkably different from that of the other two institutions. However, the bureaucratic nature of the self-study process at this institution created its own culture of compliance. Most of the instructors and some of the administrators interviewed for this study did not have an active role in the preparation of the self-study report since each section was written by standing committees. Administrators typically received the drafts and made whatever revisions they felt necessary in order to present what they believed to be an accurate depiction of the school's operation. Perceptions at the college were as disconnected as the self-study process. Faculty members at Crawford Tech voiced no unified perceptions of the self-study process at their college while administrators largely, yet erroneously, perceived that instructors disliked the process and found it burdensome. While Crawford Tech's faculty members invoked traditional values of honesty and good work ethics, the personal values of administrators were replaced by the newly-published institutional values of the college. The self-study for Crawford Technical College was prepared within a culture of bureaucratic control. Values exhibited during this process were conformity and compliance.

Theory-Building from the Study Results

The Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education was intended to be the focus of this research report. Because its member colleges have identical governance, management systems, policies and programs, it was my belief that the findings revealed at the three colleges in this study could be logically projected to occur at the other 31 institutions in the system. However, rather than draw conclusions about the self-study process for a system of colleges, the research has determined that each institution operates within its own particular culture and by its own set of values. It is this culture and these values—not one's job title or personal beliefs—that

determine faculty and administrator perceptions of the self-study process and the degree to which these perceptions influence the institution's self-study report. In those institutions where the culture respects and supports divergent opinions and collaboration, and where a well-managed and inclusive self-study process is valued, the faculty and administration will succeed in preparing a self-study report that not only accurately portrays the programs and services of the institution, but that also enjoys the support of the entire educational community.

Recommendations

As mentioned earlier in this study, findings resulting from this research are not intended to be generalizable and, therefore, applicable to other higher education settings. Furthermore, because of the personal nature of the data upon which these findings are based, conclusions drawn from this report may not be an appropriate reflection of phenomena at other technical colleges in Georgia. However, there are recommendations resulting from this study that may be useful both to educators and to members of the accreditation community.

Recommendations for Educators

Contrary to anecdotal evidence, this study found that perceptions of the accreditation self-study were generally consistent between members of the college's faculty and members of its administration. Both groups perceived that institutional accreditation enhanced the value of the college. They were also in agreement that the self-study report required the involvement of all personnel at the school and resulted in institutional improvement.

Success in the self-study effort, however, was dependent upon the processes used by the school to prepare the document. Problems in this process may have resulted in negative perceptions that could depreciate the value of the accreditation self-study. Negative perceptions

discovered in this research study may possibly be avoided in future self-study initiatives if the following guidelines are addressed:

1. Exercise good planning and leadership over the self-study process in order to avoid repetitive requests for information, unnecessary re-writes, and duplicated effort.
2. Because of the emphasis on programs and instruction in the self-study report, faculty members should be well-represented on the leadership committee guiding the self-study process.
3. Allow plenty of time for self-study preparation in order to avoid rushed research and unrealistic deadlines.
4. Resist the temptation to use another institution's self-study report as a template for one's own; respect the abilities, observations and insights of college personnel to prepare a report that is unique to each institution.
5. Plan for faculty and administration involvement in the self-study preparation in such a way that minimizes the disruption of routine instructional or administrative duties; when possible, grant in-service release time for self-study tasks.
6. Respect the information provided by all members of the college community contributing to the self-study report; openly discuss any areas of disagreement; and reach consensus on the best way to describe the institution's programs and services in the report.

These guidelines are not intended to be a definitive set of recommendations for success in the self-study process. Nevertheless, they do represent observations and comments resulting from this research study and, had they been heeded, may have reduced negative perceptions about the self-study process.

Recommendations for Accreditors

In their self-study manuals and workshops accrediting agencies set the tone for the self-study initiatives undertaken by their member institutions. They help assure a successful self-study process by designing user-friendly assessment instruments; by providing clear guidelines for the execution of a self-study plan; and by recommending practices that facilitate the preparation of the self-study report.

Findings resulting from this study underscore the importance of the following principles that should be included in an accrediting agency's orientation to the self-study process:

1. The self-study should be used to bring about the improvement of an institution's programs and services
2. Preparing the self-study report should involve all personnel at the institution; each person's observations with respect to accreditation standards are of value, should be respected, and should be incorporated into the report.
3. The institution's chief executive officer should be strongly, vocally and visibly supportive of the self-study initiative.
4. The importance of leadership and planning for the self-study process cannot be overemphasized; accrediting agencies should provide institutions with specific recommendations and guidelines to facilitate the leadership and planning of the self-study effort.
5. In order to avoid a rush of data-gathering and assessment activities in anticipation of the periodic self-study report, systems and practices should be recommended to institutions for capturing data and monitoring performance on an annual, quarterly or month-to-month basis.

In addition to recommending that accrediting agencies include the principles outlined above in their self-study orientation and preparation materials, results from this research study indicated that it would be very beneficial for the assessment processes required of national, regional, professional and state agencies be coordinated and aligned where possible in order to eliminate duplicated data gathering and performance reporting. To achieve this, it is recommended that accreditors such as the Council on Occupational Education survey its member institutions to determine the type of data required of them by other organizations and agencies. After gathering this information, the accreditors can consider designing their reports and processes to conform to requirements already met by the institution. Although this may require a considerable effort and, perhaps, some compromise on the part of some agencies, a more fluid process for reporting to multiple agencies would benefit many institutions.

Suggestions for Further Research

The phenomenon of the accreditation self-study has been examined from several perspectives, including those conditions and variables that help assure an improvement-oriented process and a favorable accreditation outcome. Studies have already been conducted that examine perceptions of accreditation agencies, and this study was devoted to perceptions of the self-study process. The focus on faculty and administrator perceptions of accreditation processes can be continued with an examination of community colleges or four-year institutions. A similar study of more traditional colleges and universities may find that values and perceptions are quite different from those found in Georgia's technical colleges. Of particular interest may be a review of accreditation processes of faculty and administrators working in proprietary institutions. This particular segment of the education field is grossly underserved by education researchers in spite of the fact that the for-profit sector of postsecondary education is fast-growing and currently

accounts for almost 80% of all institutions accredited by national accrediting agencies (CHEA, 2003). My personal experience with for-profit institutions that apply for candidacy with COE indicates an overall lack of awareness of assessment processes and a general distrust of oversight agencies of any kind. For these reasons, an attitudinal research study focusing on the proprietary education sector may prove beneficial to both institutions and accrediting agencies alike.

There have been many studies focused on the subject of values in the workplace. Hultman and Gellermann (2002) have examined this topic from the organizational development perspective. The theoretical framework for this current study drew upon the Motivational System Model they developed primarily for the corporate or manufacturing environments. Hultman and Gellermann have defined values in terms of balance, viability, alignment, and authenticity. They have described defensive, stabilizing, and growth values, as well as terminal and instrumental values. Each classification carries its own purposes and workplace applications and has its own impact on productivity and corporate culture. However, there is little evidence of research devoted to the role of any of these values in the field of education. At a time when legislators and taxpayers are focusing on institutional accountability and outcomes, a study of the values that enhance or impede productivity within the education environment would be both timely and significant.

Respondents in this study voiced a complaint about the duplication of effort required to satisfy multiple oversight agencies. Specifically, much of the data and assessment information required by COE was also required by DTAE's Performance Accountability Review report, by national allied health program accreditors, and by the SACS Commission on Colleges. These individuals expressed the desire to see a unified system of assessment that would satisfy the needs of all of these agencies and thereby significantly reduce the amount of time it takes them

to generate and report this information. These oversight agencies rarely share a common governance. Some of these agencies are regulated by the Department of Education, others by CHEA, and still others by state governments, private foundations or professional organizations. This disparity of governance presents special challenges to any attempts of collaboration or cooperation. However, research studies on the potential collaboration of accreditation processes would be very useful to the education community as well as the professional interests they serve.

The topics described above are deserving of further study. This research suggests ways that these additional studies might be instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of issues surrounding the phenomenon of accreditation. I hope other researchers follow these recommendations because accreditation continues to be a vital process for postsecondary education.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following interview questions are designed to address the perceptions of the COE accreditation self-study on the part of faculty and administrators in Georgia's technical colleges.

1. Tell me about your work experience in postsecondary education.
2. In your opinion, what value does accreditation have for a postsecondary institution?
3. What do you think are the desirable outcomes of an institutional self-study?
4. Tell me how well you think the self-study just completed at your school achieved the desirable outcomes you previously mentioned?
5. What did the school do to assure that the self-study successfully portrayed the institution?
6. What role did you play in preparing this self-study?
 - (a) How was it determined that this would be your part?
 - (b) How do you feel about being assigned this responsibility?
7. In preparing your portion of the self-study what guidance were you given?
 - (a) Who provided the guidance?
 - (b) How do you feel about the guidance you received?
8. Who actually wrote the draft of the portion of the self-study report you were assigned to work on?
 - (a) How was it determined that this person would write the draft?
 - (b) How do you feel about this person writing the draft?
9. Tell me about any revisions of your portion of the self-study report.
10. How well do you feel that the self-study your school has just produced provides, on the whole, an accurate depiction of your institution's compliance with accreditation standards?

11. Preparing the self-study usually involves participation from all members of the institutional community. Sometimes, however, people may disagree on the content of the self-study or on proposed improvements to the school. At your college, how were these differences of opinion resolved?
12. What program or institutional improvements were made that resulted from research done for the self-study?
13. What past experience have you had in working on previous accreditation self-studies?

In your past experience what is your opinion of the outcome of the self-studies you have worked on?
14. Different portions of the self-study report may reflect the core values of the people who wrote them. What are the personal values that guide your work here at the college?
15. In your opinion what different responsibilities should faculty and administrators have in the preparation of the self-study?
16. If you represented COE, what advice would you give to a school president about preparing for an upcoming institutional self-study?
17. What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia preparing a dissertation on faculty and administrator perceptions of the Council on Occupational Education accreditation self-study in Georgia's technical colleges. As someone who works for a COE-accredited college and who has first-hand experience in the preparation of the self-study report, you are in a unique position to describe your perceptions about the self-study. That is what this interview is about: your experience with and perceptions of the accreditation self-study and your thoughts about the self-study process.

The responses from all the people I interview will be combined for the dissertation. I will interview at least 10 people each from at least three DTAE colleges. Nothing you say will ever be identified with you personally. Your responses will not even be identified with your real institution since its name will be changed for the dissertation. You will simply be identified as a full-time faculty or administrator working in your particular program or area of service. The interviews will be tape recorded. The tapes and transcripts resulting from them will be in my possession only and will not be used for purposes other than the dissertation mentioned above. The tapes will be destroyed by December 31, 2005.

As we progress through the 30- to 45-minute interview if you have any questions about why I am asking something, please feel free to ask. Or if there is any question you do not want to answer, just say so. Also, please feel free to make any "side-bar" comments you like on the

subject of accreditation or the self-study process. The purpose of the interview is to get your insights into how instructors and administrators perceive the accreditation self-study.

The dissertation based on these interviews will be available through the University of Georgia's Electronic Theses and Dissertation web site only after the year 2010.

Alexander H. Wittig
Doctoral Candidate, The University of Georgia

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Faculty and Administrator Perceptions of the Council on Occupational Education Accreditation Self-Study in Georgia’s Technical Colleges” which is being conducted by Alexander H. Wittig, Institute of Higher Education, The University of Georgia (contact number 770.396.3898 ext. 18) under the direction of Dr. Delmer Dunn, Vice President of Instruction and Associate Provost, The University of Georgia (contact number 706.583.0690). My participation is voluntary; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of the study is to examine faculty and administrator perceptions of the accreditation self-study. The data gathered in the process of this research will be used by Mr. Wittig to prepare a dissertation in partial fulfillment of requirements for the doctor of education degree at The University of Georgia. The title of the dissertation is “Faculty and Administrator Perceptions of the Council on Occupational Education Accreditation Self-Study in Georgia’s Technical Colleges.” I will not directly benefit from this research.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to participate in a private, one-on-one interview with Mr. Wittig who will ask questions relating to my involvement in and perceptions of institutional accreditation and the self-study process. The interview will take place at my institution of employment at a time that is convenient to me during my customary work hours. The interview will be audio tape recorded and is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes, although one hour will be scheduled for the interview. There will be only one interview. No discomforts or stresses are expected, nor are there any physical, emotional or psychological risks expected from participating in this research.

Information gathered in this research will be kept confidential. The only persons who will know that I am a research subject are Mr. Wittig and administrators at my institution of employment who have authorized my involvement in this research. Any information collected about me will be kept confidential with Mr. Wittig only and used for this research project exclusively; no information about me or provided by me during the research will be shared with others. My name will not be on the tape recordings or on any information provided to the third-party professional preparing a written transcript of the taped interview. The name of my institution of employment will be changed for the dissertation. The tape recordings will be destroyed by December 31, 2005.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research now or during the course of the project and can be reached by telephone at 770.396.3898 ext. 18.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Alexander H. Wittig

Name of Researcher

Tel: 770.396.3898 ext. 18

Signature

email: wittiga@council.org

Jan. 11, 2005

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph. D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Research Center, Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail address IRB@uga.edu.