

2012

Reputation Cycles: The Value of Accreditation for Undergraduate Journalism Programs

Robin Blom

Michigan State University, blomrobi@msu.edu

Lucinda D. Davenport

Michigan State University

Brian J. Bowe

Grand Valley State University, brianj.bowe@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/com_articles

ScholarWorks Citation

Blom, Robin; Davenport, Lucinda D.; and Bowe, Brian J., "Reputation Cycles: The Value of Accreditation for Undergraduate Journalism Programs" (2012). *Peer Reviewed Articles*. 4.

https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/com_articles/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Communications at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Peer Reviewed Articles by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Reputation Cycles: The Value of Accreditation for Undergraduate Journalism Programs

Journalism & Mass Communication Educator
67(4) 392–406
© AEJMC 2012
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1077695812462349
<http://jmce.sagepub.com>



Robin Blom,¹ Lucinda D. Davenport,¹
and Brian J. Bowe²

Abstract

Accreditation is among various outside influences when developing an ideal journalism curriculum. The value of journalism accreditation standards for undergraduate programs has been studied and is still debated. This study discovers views of opinion leaders in U.S. journalism programs, as surveyed program directors give reasons for being accredited or not. The most important reason for schools with, or obtaining, accreditation is reputation enhancement. But many directors question accreditation's value. Some perceive the cap on journalism credits that students can take as a limitation of student development and a hindrance to responding to increasing media industry convergence.

Keywords

accreditation, journalism, undergraduate, education, reputation

In the spirit of striving to give students majoring in journalism the best possible education, journalism program administrators and educators continuously discuss and argue about the multifaceted issues that influence their goals. They search for the ultimate curriculum to serve their undergraduates and often struggle to find the right combination of skills and theory courses, required and elective courses, and courses outside journalism. Simultaneously, they also must navigate internal university constraints on

¹Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

²Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI, USA

Corresponding Author:

Robin Blom, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
48824-1212, USA
Email: blomrobi@msu.edu

requirements and budgets as well as outside pressures that include technological changes and economic turmoil within the profession.¹

Added to this litany of pressures is the option of national accreditation, which brings its own set of requirements. The U.S. Department of Education does not accredit universities or individual programs. Instead it relies on several organizations that are “considered reliable authorities as to the quality of education or training provided by the institutions of higher education and the higher education programs they accredit,” and those agencies “develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met.”² For journalism, the accreditation process of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) provides an opportunity for individual programs to reflect on their curricula and to adhere to standards followed by more than one hundred journalism schools in the United States.³

The accreditation process has several advantages for a program. Schools provide exhaustive documentation of their past accomplishments and future plans to ACEJMC visiting teams. In preparing for accreditation visits, educators produce volumes of information spanning seven years that is reflective of trends and results in a self-study—an important, necessary exercise for any program. It also provides the opportunity to gauge how a program is doing, compared to other programs in the country and in preparing students for today’s industry. Furthermore, a certain aura of pride is associated with being able to tell prospective students and parents that a program is accredited.⁴

However, ACEJMC accreditation limits how many journalism courses undergraduates can take in their degree program. That amount depends on the minimum number of credits necessary to graduate. Some administrators and educators consider the cap on the number of journalism courses as a hindrance when they want to tweak or completely redesign their journalism curriculum. Also, this sometimes presents a challenge to programs wanting to offer academic concentrations for more in-depth study within journalism (e.g., media management) or added specializations across programs.⁵

Debates about effective and efficient training methods and courses for journalists are far from new. Since the first journalism programs were founded more than a century ago, differences of opinion have existed between educators who emphasize hands-on reporting instruction and those who put more value on theoretical, liberal arts education.⁶ According to Durham, those ongoing debates have had an influence on the accreditation standards as well: “[T]he process of developing standards for journalism school accreditation in the 1940s initially created bitter political competition among the emerging schools and universities that sought legitimate status in the nascent discipline.”⁷

In an effort to understand attitudes about accreditation, this study identifies the views of 128 directors of undergraduate journalism programs on the accreditation status of their school or department and their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of ACEJMC accreditation for journalism programs. The data suggest there is much demand for the ACEJMC certification program because it enhances the reputation of institutions and can be used as a benchmark to make journalism schools

stronger. Nonetheless, many directors consider the current accreditation standards as severe limitations on the quality of journalism education.

Literature Review

ACEJMC has been authorized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to accredit programs for professional college education in journalism and mass communication. The organization was founded toward the end of World War II as the American Council on Education for Journalism (ACEJ) and adopted its current name in 1980. In its mission statement, revised more than two decades ago, ACEJMC reflects that it is “dedicated to fostering and encouraging excellence and high standards in professional education in journalism and mass communications.”⁸

As of May 2012, ACEJMC has accredited 109 programs in journalism and mass communications at colleges and universities, which is more than one-fifth of all U.S. undergraduate programs. Annual dues are about \$1,000, and the accreditation process costs several thousand dollars. All but one accredited program (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) are located in the United States, including its territories. Universities receive accreditation only after thorough self and peer assessment of academic quality. As part of the process, a review team of educators and industry professionals examines collected annual documentation and multiyear trends supporting the program’s compliance with ACEJMC standards and visits each campus to interview the faculty and staff. The team writes its report on-site. Undergraduate programs apply for reaccreditation every six years to demonstrate that they support the “value of a liberal arts and sciences curriculum as the essential foundation for a professional journalism and mass communications education.”⁹

The organization has nine standards on which the accreditation decisions are based: (1) policies and practices of the unit, (2) the overall curriculum, (3) diversity and inclusiveness issues, (4) balance of academic and professional credentials for full-time and part-time faculty, (5) advancement of scholarly and professional knowledge and creativity, (6) support and services for students, (7) adequate resources to fulfill and sustain its mission, (8) professional and public services, and (9) assessment of learning outcomes.¹⁰

With these standards ACEJMC upholds rigorous quality levels in professional education in journalism and mass communication,¹¹ but does not mandate specific curricula, courses, or methods of instruction: “It recognizes that each institution has its unique situation, mission and resources, and this uniqueness is an asset to be safeguarded. The Council judges programs against the objectives that units and institutions set for themselves and against the standards that the Council sets forth for preparing students for professional careers in journalism and mass communications.”¹²

News organizations have complained about the training and inadequacies of some of their recruits¹³ (although anecdotal evidence sometimes suggests the opposite¹⁴). Furthermore, some critics question the value of journalism education in its entirety. A task force from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) remarked that the “most vocal critics suggest that educators not only are

inept and out of touch with communication practitioners in the media-related professions, but that media education is irrelevant to the media-related professions.”¹⁵

Within academia there has been resistance to criticisms by advocating for curricula based on academic standards, rather than on standards based on the presumed needs of media industries. Because of the severe tug-of-war among numerous stakeholders in the process (educators, professionals, students, parents, news consumers, etc.), many commissions and research teams, along with passionate individuals, have made an effort to diagnose the challenges with journalism education.¹⁶

The accreditation process is one measure that a journalism and mass communication department or school voluntarily takes to uphold and increase the quality of its program, to address criticism on the quality of instruction.¹⁷ More than one hundred schools have undergone the accreditation or reaccreditation process in recent years. It is a testament to the perceived importance of accreditation that administrators and educators continue to deploy their scarce (and, in many cases, dwindling) time and resources toward achieving accredited status. For them, it is important that prospective students and employers witness that the programs meet certain quality standards. As such, it can raise the reputation of the department or school among academic leaders of the institution.¹⁸ In addition, accredited programs offer scholarships and prize competitions not available to nonaccredited programs, such as the Hearst Awards, which present monetary prizes to both students and their institutions.¹⁹

The accreditation process can serve as a benchmark for programs to discover their strengths and, importantly, weak spots. As part of the cycle, administrators produce a sizeable amount of information on the curriculum, course content, service requirements, and academic leadership, among a variety of other areas. It allows the chance for outside professionals and educators to review a program in depth. The documents are evaluated by ACEJMC representatives, including the committee that visits the program on-site. Schools also are encouraged to reflect on the data as a form of self-study. The students presumably benefit from this process because the reflections can lead to improved programs that are better at preparing students for successful careers in the journalism industry.²⁰

Constraints on Training Journalists at Accredited Institutions

A wide variety of approaches exist to establish successful journalism undergraduate programs.²¹ But if the creation of a curriculum is not already challenging enough, technological advancements can cause educators to regularly revise programs. The emergence of the Internet into general society in the 1980s and the rise of World Wide Web in the 1990s prompted changes to curricula. Two decades later, the buzzword in journalism education became *convergence*, which developed into one of the most contested topics among journalism educators.²² In recent years, many journalism programs have reinvented themselves to include instruction across media formats and multiple media platforms, including website development.²³ These changes are supported by the

job market, as a majority of recruiters at news media outlets consider convergence skills moderate to very important when hiring journalists.²⁴

A well-established belief among journalism educators is that it is also important for students to take courses outside of journalism because it is essential to learn about life and the world, since that is what news is all about—a value that is reflected in ACEJMC's commitment to requiring students in accredited programs to acquire a broad background in the liberal arts and sciences.²⁵ And while it is good to have journalists as generalists, it is also important to have those who specialize in a particular area, such as the environment or public policy, to ask incisive and knowledgeable questions and to put the issues into context and perspective for a large audience. As Tom Jacobson maintained, "Social complexity has multiplied dramatically. . . . It seems reasonable to expect that the liberal education traditionally expected of journalists must now go beyond the ability to write, beyond a skepticism towards given truth, and beyond a sense of the drift of modern history."²⁶ The spirit of the ACEJMC standards, therefore, is to provide journalism students with a thorough liberal arts background by requiring students to take courses in political science, history, and other areas in the humanities and social sciences.²⁷ That is also why a considerable number of undergraduate journalism program directors consider it beneficial for all journalism students to take critical-thinking courses.²⁸

Thus, many topics and skills need to be covered in a journalism degree program to prepare students for today's rapidly changing journalism world of multimedia and convergence. Blom and Davenport found that directors of U.S. journalism programs put much value in many different journalism courses. The sheer quantity of potential and valuable core courses and electives is much higher than most schools can afford—regardless of their accreditation status. This increases the dilemma of program directors for developing and managing an appropriate curriculum. When courses are added, it often means that others need to be canceled to stay within budget and to maintain resources. For some students, those canceled classes are essential for their development as future reporters and editors. The decision to include certain courses but exclude others is often difficult. Furthermore, many educators worry that the number of courses offered in a program and the amount of information within each course is simply not enough to equip journalists for the expanding current and future industry.²⁹

It is possible to add additional journalism credits to an overall bachelor's degree program to cover all important areas (and sometimes increase the years it takes to earn a bachelor's degree). But this is not possible for students at accredited schools that want to comply with ACEJMC rules. One issue with accreditation standards over the years is a cap on the maximum number of credit hours that journalism students can pursue.³⁰ The organization states for standard 2, Curriculum and Instruction, that "the unit requires that students take a minimum of 80 semester credit hours or 116 quarter credit hours outside of the unit and a minimum of 65 semester credit hours or 94 quarter credit hours in the liberal arts and sciences (as defined by the institution) outside of the unit."³¹

The accreditation process has been the subject of discussion for its apparent concentration on academic credentials and lesser attention to student outcomes.³² The amount or lack of flexibility becomes visible when schools want to make radical

changes in their curriculum. Nonaccredited schools that want to add convergence elements are more likely to modify their programs than are accredited schools. Those programs are more likely to continue existing specializations, but overall the curriculum does not show the diversity in course offerings as seen in other countries, such as Canada, where there is no accreditation system.³³

Journalism credit limits have been heavily debated in the past and changed several times. For example, an AEJMC Curriculum Task Force recommended in the mid-1990s that the accreditation process be restructured, allowing for more creativity and experimentation among the programs.³⁴ Others desired to count certain journalism courses among the liberal arts credits that eventually left more room for additional journalism courses while still adhering to the accreditation standards.³⁵

Lowrey, Daniels, and Becker also advocated for additional changes of the accreditation standards. They indicated that less rigidity is essential to allow swift transformation of curricula when this enhances the education experience for their students: “If such changes prove beneficial, larger programs should take a hard look at the factors constraining their own change (e.g., accreditation constraints, political divisions, and professional norms) that encourage programs to play it safe.”³⁶

Other Thoughts about Accreditation

As with all things, different programs make their own decisions on pursuing (re) accreditation based on their situations. Some schools do not pursue accreditation because of the large and expensive burden that requires time and resources. Others do not apply because they know it is not possible to adhere to some of the strict standards. Some smaller schools cannot hire the required faculty (for smaller classes) or afford other adjustments necessary to become eligible for the accreditation. The on-site visit costs are in addition to the expense of compiling all documentation (while to other schools, being accredited is worth every penny because of the long-term benefits).³⁷

In addition, the quality and motivation of the accreditation teams may vary, which could provide administrators some reservations on whether the accreditation would be a beneficial investment or a waste of time and resources. Some have also pointed out that recruiters from news organizations do not necessarily care whether potential interns or entry-level employees got their education from an accredited institution. For instance, according to Terry Greenberg, editor of the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, “In 26 years of being a newspaper editor, it’s never even crossed my mind whether I would hire somebody or not hire somebody if their school is accredited.”³⁸ (Similarly, graduate programs in mass communication and other disciplines do not seem to care whether the holders of bachelor’s degrees in journalism and related fields graduated from an ACEJMC-accredited program.)

Seamon argued in an essay about the quality of accredited and nonaccredited journalism programs, “ACEJMC accreditation is a credential whose reputation exceeds its actual benefit.”³⁹ He noted, as only one example, that a 1994 article in the now-defunct *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* asserted that journalism

students, faculty, and practitioners all disagree with ACEJMC's accreditation diversity standards and the concentration on the liberal arts.

The lack of accreditation is not necessarily detrimental to journalism programs. Several scholars have found that the education provided by such schools is of equal quality as, if not better than, the education provided by certified schools.⁴⁰ Massé and Popovich asserted that the two groups of programs are "similar in their approaches to the teaching of media writing, that writing courses are structured similarly, and that faculty qualifications and faculty attitudes toward media writing are very similar."⁴¹

This is one reason that some schools have avoided the accreditation process or, as with the notable example of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, have declined reaccreditation.⁴² In recent years, other programs have let their accreditation lapse as well. For instance, the University of Miami (Florida), University of Wisconsin–River Falls,⁴³ University of Utah, Texas Tech University,⁴⁴ and Middle Tennessee State University (graduate program only)⁴⁵ did not seek reaccreditation in the past few years. Also, six tenure-track journalism faculty at New Mexico State University unanimously voted against the renewal in 2011 because the "process is both labor intensive and departmental expensive."⁴⁶ Seamon listed several other prominent journalism programs, such as Ohio State University, Stanford University, Rutgers University, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, that have not sought accreditation from ACEJMC in recent times. Another example is the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University.

Research Questions

Beyond the comparisons between accredited and nonaccredited programs in certain educational areas, little literature exists that documents the perceptions of ACEJMC's accreditation process by administrators. This study is an effort to fill this void by providing an overview of reasons why journalism undergraduate programs are part of ACEJMC—or why not. To understand the situation better, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Why do journalism undergraduate programs pursue accreditation by the ACEJMC?

RQ2: Why do journalism undergraduate program directors decline to pursue accreditation by the ACEJMC?

RQ3: Are journalism undergraduate programs applying for (re)accreditation in the near future?

Method and Sample

About four hundred directors of journalism undergraduate programs within the United States were approached. The 2008–9 *Directory* of the AEJMC was used to gather information on schools with journalism programs and the names of their directors.

Additional searches of individual school websites were conducted to verify information from the directory, when names of directors were not presented, and when the school's description raised doubts about the existence of a bachelor's degree program in journalism or a similar field, such as broadcasting.

A web survey was created for the purpose of this study. Directors received an email inviting them to participate and were able to click on a hyperlink that took them to the survey website. The hyperlinks were personalized for each individual. Only readers of the emails were able to make contact with the website host. Those who did not respond received another request by email a few days after the first delivery. This was repeated one more time about a week after the second round.

We received a response from 158 directors (38 percent). Twelve noted that their school offered journalism courses, but not a complete program for a bachelor's degree in journalism. For instance, the journalism courses were part of an organizational communication degree. Twelve other persons skipped over essential parts of the survey without providing information, and their data were discarded. The findings below are based on the information provided by 128 journalism directors nationwide who appropriately completed the basic accreditation questions; among them, 100 directors provided additional information on their reasons to pursue accreditation or not.

The content of these comments was analyzed to answer the research questions. Based on prior literature, several categories were proposed that would indicate why programs had gone through accreditation: (1) leads to valuable data, (2) makes reputation of program stronger, (3) leads to a well-rounded (liberal arts) education, or (4) another reason. After analyzing the comments of the last category, the decision was made to add another category: (5) accreditation is mandated by university leadership. This was done because almost half of the (initial) "other" comments focused on this reason.

Schools without accreditation were also asked for the prime reason of that decision. This led to two types of answers. First, some schools do not apply because they cannot comply with the basic standards of ACEJMC because of (1) a small number of full-time faculty, (2) limited resources, or (3) small research productivity by the faculty. Second, schools did not pursue the accreditation process because it (4) is perceived as having no value to enrich education, (5) provides (journalism) course limitations for students, (6) is burdensome, (7) is too expensive, or (8) another reason. Schools in the process of gaining accreditation are mentioned separately in the results section. Similar to the schools that currently have or are applying for accreditation, an additional category was added afterward that addressed the possibility that programs do not apply because (9) of a mandate by university leadership.

All comments were coded by two of the authors. They initially agreed on 94 percent of all comments (Cohen's $\kappa = .89$). The eight disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Results

A little more than one-third of the 128 respondents indicated that their journalism undergraduate program was accredited by the ACEJMC. A majority of the surveyed

research universities (both *very high research activity* and *high research activity* universities) were accredited. This was the case for twenty-six of the thirty-nine research colleges in this sample (67 percent). For all other schools, this percentage was much lower (28 percent).

The data suggest that many schools consider accreditation as a reputation enhancer (see Table 1). Or as some study participants described it, “Accreditation provides a stamp of approval” and “[it adds] credibility to our program.” Almost half the journalism program directors considered this the most important reason to join ACEJMC (45 percent).

They maintain that being accredited can help recruit new students to the programs. One of them responded, “Current and prospective students often ask about it, and it makes sense for us pedagogically.” Some administrators pointed to the accreditation status of other in-state schools (“competitors”) and noted that they needed to be in a similar standing to keep up admissions. Furthermore, accreditation is perceived as increasing “credibility on campus and beyond.”

A much smaller group of respondents consider the self- and peer-review process most valuable in creating a better program (18 percent), but none of them mentioned that the concentration on liberal arts courses in ACEJMC-endorsed programs was the most important cause of gaining accreditation. It also became clear that some schools are mandated to pursue accreditation by university leadership, whether the directors want it or not (16 percent).

That said, not all directors of accredited programs are content to adhere to ACEJMC’s standards, whether encouraged by academic leadership or as agreed to by the department or school at an earlier time. A few whose programs are accredited see little value in being accredited. As one director responded as to why his or her school sought ACEJMC’s endorsement, “Good question.”

Such a reaction was common among program directors from schools or departments without accreditation. This group considered the review process without merit to enrich curricula (8 percent), burdensome (2 percent), and too expensive (10 percent). “Why choose a voluntary accreditation that has little value or rewards but costs much time, effort and money,” one participant wrote.

In addition, a common response for not pursuing (re)accreditation was the cap on the number of journalism credits students can take (17 percent). It was considered a limitation in preparing students for a career at news media organizations or as independent journalists: “[W]e need more credit hours in the major to make our students marketable.” Another respondent remarked that ACEJMC accreditation did not offer additional value. “Our students are as well educated and get good jobs and are in high demand.” Others agreed, stating that “accreditation is too stringent in terms of curriculum requirements.” For example, as one of the directors described, “[S]tudents who major in our [department] can’t [also] minor in our [department] or double-major in our [department]—which is a popular thing to do right now.”

Most programs without ACEJMC approval are located within small departments. Many of them have only a few full-time faculty members, who focus primarily on teaching rather than research, and have limited resources. Consequently, they said they cannot

Table 1. Reasons to Pursue or Decline Accreditation from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Accreditation: Yes		
Accreditation makes reputation of program stronger	17	45
Accreditation process leads to valuable data to make program stronger	10	18
Accreditation is mandated by university leadership	6	16
Accreditation leads to well-rounded education (better student outcomes)	0	0
Other	8	21
Total	41	
Accreditation: No		
Not enough resources to comply	18	31
Not enough faculty available to comply to standards	10	17
Not enough research by faculty to comply	1	2
Accreditation process provided limitations for program/students	10	17
Accreditation process is considered too expensive	6	10
Accreditation process has no value to enrich education	5	8
Accreditation process is burdensome	1	2
Accreditation is prohibited as mandate by university leadership	1	2
Other	7	12
Total	59	

adhere to the most basic ACEJMC standards. Some directors indicated that they liked the idea of being accredited and would like to apply if they had larger departments.

Of the forty-six programs within this sample that are accredited, three do not intend to reapply. Another school is still undecided. Of those schools without certification, nine said they would like to apply by spring 2012. Almost thirty schools were still undecided on a similar decision. That also means that more than half the schools in this sample already had made a decision to pass on that opportunity in the near future. But, overall, this still means that ACEJMC's influence on the field potentially could grow, making up for the decline of 114 to 109 accredited schools from March 2010 to May 2012.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study provides an overview of what program directors of journalism undergraduate programs consider the most important reasons for adhering to ACEJMC's standards and reasons for declining to be part of its accreditation process. The accreditation program wields a large influence on the field, as about one in five programs is accredited by ACEJMC, and its guidelines have been popularly debated for decades. This study supplements the literature on the pros and cons of accreditation by finding

out what the opinion leaders in programs and in the discipline (administrators) think about the value of accreditation.

For schools with accreditation, or those in the accreditation process, it is clear what the most important reason is reputation enhancement. Journalism schools try to enhance their standing to be attractive to bright high school students who want to learn journalism and as a result bring financial resources to, and obtain them from, the university. Accreditation serves as an indicator that the department or school has certain quality levels.

Yet not everyone agrees with the idea that the ACEJMC standards represent high quality because of the limitations ACEJMC sets for the number of credits that can be earned for taking journalism courses in an entire undergraduate curriculum. This study points out that a considerable number of directors do not like those guidelines, as directors perceive them as a limitation on students' development. This argument is pertaining to specific student outcomes, while the main argument *for* accreditation is not necessarily focused on student outcomes. This is not to state that programs do not foresee benefits for accreditation (e.g., one out of five directors values the peer-review data to strengthen the program the most), but it shows that the main benefit of accreditation not specifically addressed is the educational component.

Along that line, it is notable that no director cited the liberal arts component in the ACEJMC standards. The cap on journalism courses is primarily instituted to expose students to a lot of courses in the liberal arts (including humanities, social sciences, and sciences). Although this study does not provide direct insight about how much journalism program directors value a liberal arts background, it is important to note that they generally consider the reputation enhancement and the self- and peer-review data *more* beneficial.

Those findings lead to a variety of questions. For instance, where student outcomes can be measured, this is much harder when it comes to assessing how increased perceived reputation is valuable for programs. Because a considerable group of administrators maintain that accreditation enhances the reputation of their schools or departments, additional research is necessary to establish how schools benefit from this perceived status. Is accreditation one of the foremost reasons students (and their parents) choose to apply for those programs, rather than selecting nearby nonaccredited institutions? In other words, do schools win competition battles with other schools when it comes to new admissions? (How often prospective students and/or their parents or other advisors inquire about ACEJMC accreditation is unknown, and anecdotal evidence suggests it is uncommon.)

Some respondents mentioned that the process also enhances the reputation on their own campus among academic leadership and other departments. This claim should be explored as well. First, does accreditation, indeed, result in recognition from other faculty and administrators, and to what extent is it considered important? And, moreover, are there measurable outcomes that point out that the accreditation leads to more resources for the program, such as internal university resources? And does the accreditation lead to additional outside revenue streams, such as grants, gifts, and alumni donations?

Comments from directors of smaller journalism programs also show that a number of them would like to join ACEJMC but cannot do so because of their limited size. Yet those circumstances do not necessarily indicate superior or inferior manners of instruction in the classroom. Future research could explore how schools without accreditation compete for students with other (accredited) institutions and whether nonaccreditation is cited by students to pass on the opportunity to apply for such programs. More important, would it be possible to examine the quality of those programs systematically, without taking into account *all* ACEJMC's evaluation criteria, and make those results visible to students and parents?

As is common in survey-based research, this study has a few limitations. Not all program directors responded to the request to participate in this study. In addition, a follow-up study should not be limited to directors and should integrate responses from faculty because they are primarily responsible for implementing findings of the reviews when it comes to class content and pedagogy. For instance, do they feel that their teaching performance is enhanced by the accreditation process? And do they think accreditation is worthwhile considering the time that they spend on completing the paperwork required for the review teams?

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Robin Blom and Lucinda D. Davenport, "Searching for the Core of Journalism Education: Program Directors Disagree on Curriculum Priorities," *Journalism & Mass Communication* 67 (1, 2012): 70–86; David Nolan, "Journalism, Education and the Formation of 'Public Subjects,'" *Journalism* 9 (6, 2008): 733–49; also see Elizabeth Birge, "But What Is It? Educators Struggle with Ambiguous Definitions of the Profession," *Quill*, May 2004.
2. U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education, "The Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs," <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>.
3. Koji Fuse and Jacqueline J. Lambiase, "Alumni Perceptions of the ACEJMC's 11 Professional Values and Competencies," *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* 74 (1, 2010): 436–55.
4. For an extensive discussion about the practice and value of journalism programs' self-assessments, see Paul Parsons, "Indirect Measures: Institutional Data, Surveys, Interviews, and Advisory Boards," in *Assessing Media Education: A Resource Handbook for Educators and Administrators*, ed. William G. Christ (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 329–48.
5. Robert O. Blanchard and William G. Christ, *Media Education and the Liberal Arts: A Blueprint for the New Professionalism* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993); Tom Dickson,

- Mass Media Education in Transition: Preparing for the 21st Century* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000); Gerald C. Stone, "Survey Reflects Disagreement on 25 Percent Accrediting Rule," *Journalism Educator* 38 (4, 1984): 13–16; Fuse and Lambiase, "Alumni Perceptions."
6. Wanda Brandon, "Experiential Learning: A New Research Path to the Study of Journalism Education," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 57 (1, 2002): 59–66; Kathleen A. Hansen, "Values and Competencies from the Clash of Professional and Academic Cultures," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 60 (2, 2005): 130–34; also see Stephen D. Reese, "The Progressive Potential of Journalism Education: Recasting the Academic versus Professional Debate," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 4 (4, 1999): 70–94; Fred Bales, "Newspaper Editors' Evaluations of Professional Programs," *Journalism Educator* 47 (3, 1992): 37–42.
 7. Frank Durham, "Cultural History of a Curriculum: The Search for Salience," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 46 (4, 1992): 14–21, 16.
 8. Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), "Mission Statement" (2004), <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/mission.SHTML>.
 9. Ibid.
 10. ACEJMC, "Accrediting Standards" (2004), <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML>.
 11. ACEJMC, "Vision Statement" (1994), <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/GENINFO.SHTML>.
 12. ACEJMC, "Accrediting Standards."
 13. Tom Dickson and Wanda Brandon, "The Gap between Educators and Professional Journalists," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 55 (3, 2000): 50–67; also see Carnegie Corporation, *Improving the Education of Tomorrow's Journalists* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 2005), in which many professionals indicated that bachelor's degrees in journalism could be considered useless; Lepre and Bleske, "Little Common Ground for Magazine Editors and Professors Surveyed on Journalism Curriculum," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (60, 2005): 190–200; Fred Fedler, "Growing Body of Evidence Refutes Some Criticism of J-Schools" (paper, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, MO, 1993).
 14. Blom and Davenport, "Searching for the Core."
 15. AEJMC Curriculum Task Force, "Challenge: Responding to the Challenge of Change," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 50 (4, 1996): 101–19.
 16. Marian A. Smith, "Perceptions of Quality in Journalism and Communication Education: A Delphi Study," *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* (1, 1997): 32–50; Brandon, "Experiential Learning"; Carnegie Corporation, *Improving the Education of Tomorrow's Journalists*; Betty Medsger, *Winds of Change: Challenges Confronting Journalism Education* (Washington, DC: Freedom Forum, 1996).
 17. G. Stuart Adam, "The Education of Journalists," *Journalism* 2 (3, 2001): 315–39; Everette Dennis, "Journalism Education: Failing Grades from a Dean," *ASNE Bulletin*, October 1983; Dickson and Brandon, "Gap between Educators and Professional Journalists"; Hansen, "Values and Competencies."

18. William G. Christ, "Introduction—Why Assessment Matters," in Christ, *Assessing Media Education*, 3–16.
19. The Hearst Journalism Award Program guidelines specify that "[p]articipation in the program is open to undergraduate journalism majors currently enrolled in ACEJMC-accredited universities." For more information, see http://www.hearstfdn.org/hearst_journalism/about.php.
20. Lana F. Rakow, "Reflections on the Impact of Assessment on Accreditation: Foxes and Henhouses," in Christ, *Assessing Media Education*, 549–66.
21. Robert O. Blanchard and William G. Christ, "In Search of the Unit Core: Commonalities in Curricula," *Journalism Education* 40 (3, 1985): 28–33; Thomas V. Dickson and Ralph L. Sellmeyer, "Responses to Proposals for Curricular Change," *Journalism Educator* 47 (3, 1992): 27–36.
22. Laura Castañeda, Sheila Murphy, and Heather Jane Hether, "Teaching Print, Broadcast, and Online Journalism Concurrently: A Case Study Assessing a Convergence Curriculum," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 60 (spring 2005): 57–70; Wilson Lowrey, George L. Daniels, and Lee B. Becker, "Predictors of Convergence Curricula in Journalism and Mass Communication Programs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 60 (1, 2005): 32–46.
23. In Castañeda, Murphy, and Hether, "Teaching Print, Broadcast, and Online Journalism Concurrently"; Lewis A. Friedland and Sheila Webb, "Incorporating Online Publishing into the Curriculum," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 51 (3, 1996): 54–65; Anne M. Hoag et al., "A Literature Review of Computers and Pedagogy for Journalism and Mass Communication Education," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 57 (4, 2003): 399–412.
24. Camille Kraepelin and Carrie Anna Criado, "Building a Case for Convergence Journalism Curriculum," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 60 (1, 2005): 47–56.
25. ACEJMC, "Value of Accreditation," <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/ACCRED-BASICS.SHTML>.
26. Tom Jacobson, "The Disappearance of Journalism," in "Symposium: Journalism and Mass Communication Education at the Crossroads," ed. Jeremy Cohen et al., *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 56 (3, 2001): 4–27, 19.
27. AEJMC Curriculum Task Force, "Challenge: Responding to the Challenge of Change."
28. Blom and Davenport, "Searching for the Core."
29. Daniel A. Panici, "New Media and the Introductory Mass Communication Course," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 53 (Spring 1988): 52–63; Kraepelin and Criado, "Building a Case for Convergence."
30. Robert E. Drechsel, "Why Wisconsin Opted Out of the Reaccreditation Process: Acting in the Best Interest of Students and Program," *Journalism Educator* 47 (4, 1993): 67–69.
31. ACEJMC, "Curriculum and Instruction," <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML>.
32. Medsger, *Winds of Change*.
33. Peter Johansen, David H. Weaver, and Christopher Dornan, "Journalism Education in the United States and Canada: Not Merely Clones," *Journalism Studies* 2 (November 2001): 469–83.

34. AEJMC Curriculum Task Force, "Challenge: Responding to the Challenge of Change."
35. Drechsel, "Why Wisconsin Opted Out of the Reaccreditation Process"
36. Lowrey, Daniels, and Becker, "Predictors of Convergence Curricula," 43.
37. Dickson, *Mass Media Education in Transition*.
38. Debra Chapman, "Texas Tech drops journalism accreditation," *TexasTechToday*, February 9, 2010, <http://texastechtoday.com/news/?p=2407>.
39. Marc C. Seamon, "The Value of Accreditation: An Overview of Three Decades of Research Comparing Accredited and Unaccredited Journalism and Mass Communication Programs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 65 (1, 2010): 9–20, 10.
40. Douglas Anderson and Richard Cole, "Perceptions of the Accrediting Process through the Eyes of Administrators Whose Programs Were Reviewed in 1991–92," *Insights: Journal of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication* (winter 1994): 6–10; Bob Carroll, "Accredited: Non-Accredited News Curricula Are Similar," *Journalism Educator* 32 (April 1977): 42–43; Christine Cusatis and Renee Martin-Kratzer, "Assessing the State of Math Education in ACEJMC-Accredited and Non-Accredited Undergraduate Journalism Programs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 64 (winter 2010): 356–77; Federico Subervi and Tania H. Cantrell, "Assessing Efforts and Policies Related to the Recruitment and Retention of Minority Faculty at Accredited and Non-Accredited Journalism and Mass Communication Programs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 62 (spring 2007): 27–46; Jennifer Wood Adams and Melissa L. Voynich, "The Use of Design Technology in U.S. Journalism Programs," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 63 (spring 2008): 42–54.
41. Mark H. Massé and Mark N. Popovich, "Accredited and Nonaccredited Media Writing Programs Are Stagnant, Resistant to Curricular Reform, and Similar," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 62 (2, 2007): 142–60, 142.
42. Drechsel, "Why Wisconsin Opted Out of the Reaccreditation Process"; Seamon, "Value of Accreditation."
43. Ascent, http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/ASCENT/19/19_1.pdf.
44. Ascent, http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/ASCENT/17/17_2.shtml.
45. Ascent, http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/ASCENT/18/18_2.pdf.
46. Sean McClenaghan, "Interim Department Head's Withdrawal Statement from ACEJMC Independent-Agency Accreditation," http://journalism.nmsu.edu/files/Seans_ACEJMC_Statement.pdf.

Bios

Robin Blom is a doctoral student in the Media & Information Studies program at Michigan State University.

Lucinda D. Davenport is the director of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University.

Brian J. Bowe is a visiting lecturer at Université Paris-Sorbonne and a doctoral student in the Media & Information Studies program at Michigan State University.