

# **Re-examining the Accreditation System for Public Administration Education: Basis for Future Reforms**

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*The article explores comparisons of international and local accreditation systems for Public Administration (PA) education to identify prospects for harmonization. It looks into the accreditation processes and standards of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, Inc. (AACCUP) as a local model vis-à-vis three international PA accrediting models: International Commission on the Accreditation of Public Administration Education and Training Programs (ICAPA), Network of Schools of Public Administration and Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and European Association for Public Administration (EAPAA). The findings show that certain accreditation processes and standards of excellence may be integrated by the AACCUP as a way of responding to the internationalization of accreditation systems for the improvement of the quality of Public Administration education.*

**Keywords:** *accreditation process, quality standards, Public Administration education, quality assurance. accreditation models*

Accreditation has become the most widely used method of external quality assurance (QA) system in many higher education systems in the world (Martin & Stella, 2007; Stensaker, 2011). In fact, numerous studies have already confirmed the significant effects of accreditation in improving the quality of education (Pham, 2018; Ching, 2013; Nicholson, 2011; Clark & Menifield, 2005; Phelps, 2001).

Accreditation has also earned wide recognition as a means to improve the quality of Public Administration (PA) education in the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world (Rosenbaum, 2015, p.16). Presently, there are independent accrediting bodies that undertake international accreditation of PA academic programs such as the International Commission on the Accreditation of Public Administration Education and Training Programs (ICAPA), Network of Schools of Public Administration and Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and European Association for Public Administration (EAPAA).

In the Philippines, accreditation is one of the QA mechanisms used by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to evaluate PA educational programs offered by both public and private higher educational institutions (HEIs).

These HEIs are free to choose from among the local accrediting agencies, to wit: (a) Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU); (b) Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA); (c) Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Agencies Inc. (ACSCU-AAI); (d) Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, Inc. (AACCUP); and (e) Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation, Inc. (ALCUCOA).

Notably, however, there are concerns about the need to revisit accreditation as a means to assure quality. One of the issues confronting the accreditation system in the country is that the accreditation process generally tends to be slow. Corpus (2003) once argued that with more than 2,000 HEIs all over the country, it would take many years or even a century to accredit all program in even just one cycle. He further stated that from 1957 to 2003, program accreditation covered less than 20% of HEIs.

Accrediting agencies also use different sets of standards or benchmark criteria to measure excellence in PA education. In the Philippines, there is no specific program accrediting agency that solely evaluates PA academic programs. Rather, the country has five independent accrediting bodies, which have varying standards in accrediting PA academic programs. As Bernardo (2005, as cited in Carinugan, 2015) puts it, there is no common set of indicators that is used to define quality of HEIs. In fact, overlaps exist, with the various indicators being used by the different accrediting bodies in assessing quality.

Thus, a careful revisit of accreditation as a mechanism to improve the quality of PA education is needed. This has also been pointed out by Filipino PA scholars Brillantes and Fernandez (2013) and Ricote (2008). Similarly, Cruz (2014) stressed the need to strengthen and strictly implement policies on accreditation and monitoring of HEI programs to ensure quality and competitiveness.

Local accrediting bodies may draw inspiration from the international PA accrediting bodies such as the ICAPA, NASPAA, and EAPAA. The harmonization of local standards with global standards would be a response to the growing trend of internationalization of QA systems in which accreditation systems are benchmarked against world-class standards (Dotong & Laguardor, 2015; Miyahara, 2015; Ching, 2013; Phelps, 2001). Many countries, in fact, use the existing accreditation schemes of other countries as their role models and sources of inspiration in setting up their own accreditation schemes (Prøitz et al., 2004, p. 748).

This article explores comparisons of international and local accreditation systems for PA education. It aims to discuss the standards and processes of a

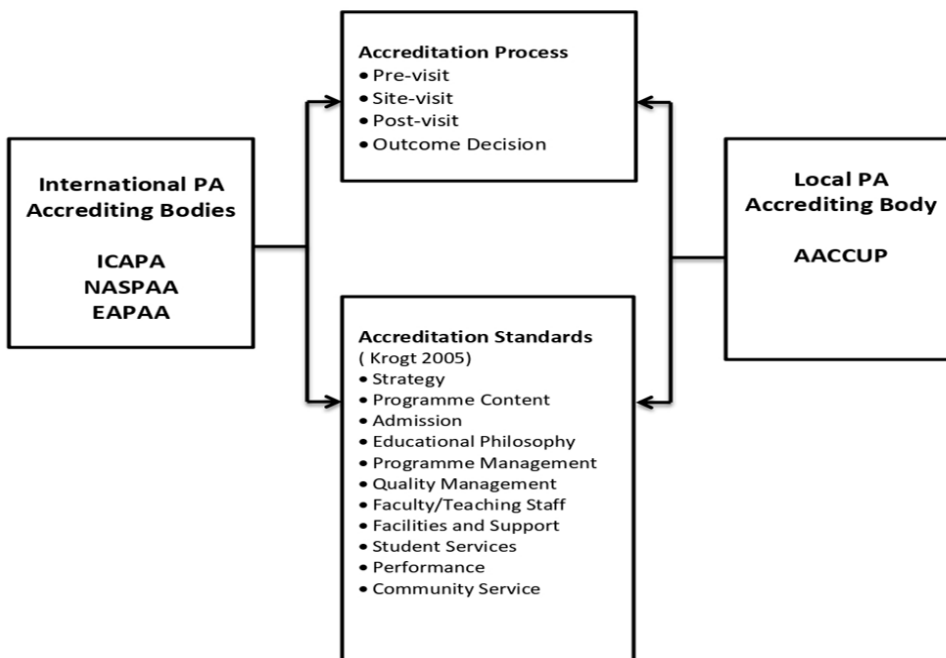
selected local model, which is the AACCUP, and compare it with those of the international PA accrediting models to identify prospects for harmonization.

### Comparative Framework and Methodology

While studies comparing the Philippine QA system with international higher education QA practices had been previously done (Corpus, 2003; Arcelo, 2003; Padua, 2003; Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization-Regional Center for Higher Education and Development [SEAMEO-RIHED], 2012), this study specifically compares the AACCUP accreditation processes and standards for graduate PA education with the international PA accrediting bodies.

The accreditation processes of the four models were compared in terms of the following phases of accreditation: pre-visit, site visit, post-visit, and outcome decision. Meanwhile, the standards were analyzed using the 11 categories of criteria by Van der Krogt (2005), to wit: (a) strategy, (b) program content, (c) admission, (d) educational philosophy, (e) program management, (f) quality management, (g) faculty/teaching staff, (h) facilities and support, (i) student services, (j) performance, and (k) community service.

**Figure 1**  
*Operational Framework of the Study*



The study involved an assessment of the AACCUP standards and processes against the published standards and processes of ICAPA, NASPAA, and EAPAA. The latter were chosen because they are currently the accrediting bodies that engage in either worldwide accreditation of PA academic programs—like the ICAPA and NASPAA—or within a specific region only such as the case of EAPAA, which undertakes accreditation activities within Europe. Meanwhile, the AACCUP was chosen among other Philippine accrediting bodies since it is the main accrediting body for state universities and colleges (SUCs) in the country. The ALCU-COA mainly accredits local universities and colleges (LUCs) while PAASCU, PACU-COA, and ACSCU-AAI mostly cater to the accreditation needs of private HEIs. The study is thus limited as it only selected AACCUP as a local model of accreditation. As a faculty of a state-funded university, the author's appreciation and experience of how AACCUP accreditation works helped in the analysis of accreditation standards and processes.

For ICAPA, EAPAA, and NASPAA, the study is limited to the use of secondary data, which were accessed online from the official websites of the accrediting bodies. For AACCUP, primary data were collected using interviews with CHED and AACCUP officials, accreditors, and key informants from the following state universities: Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) in the National Capital Region, University of Northern Philippines (UNP) in Region I, Isabela State University (ISU) in Region II, and Tarlac State University (TSU) in Region III. These SUCs were selected based on the following criteria: (a) located within Luzon; (b) members of the Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines (ASPAP); (c) offer PA academic programs in undergraduate and graduate levels; and (4) with AACCUP Level III status in their PA master's program. The respondents from the SUCs included the program dean/chair, the faculty, and some students under the PA master's program. In the case of TSU and PUP, the director for quality assurance was also interviewed.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Profile of PA Accrediting Agencies**

This part provides a brief background of the four PA accreditation models based on the parameters used by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) in comparing the different QA models in Southeast Asian countries.

#### *1. Ownership*

The accrediting agencies are all private, voluntary organizations that are engaged in the accreditation of PA educational institutions or programs. Although

these organizations exist independently of the state, they clearly complement the countries' QA programs and strategies. For instance, in the Philippines, the CHED strongly encourages the use of voluntary, non-governmental accreditation systems by giving incentives, greater autonomy, and other benefits to HEIs.

## *2. Founding Date*

Of the four, NASPAA, which was established as early as 1970, is the oldest existing PA accrediting body. The former National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration changed its name to Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration in 2013. NASPAA's system of voluntary peer review started in 1977. Starting 2003, NASPAA formally explored the idea of an internationalized accreditation process (MacFarland, 2015).

AACCUP was established next in 1989 as an independent accrediting agency of the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges or PASUC (Arcelo, 2003). AACCUP is under the National Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (NNQAA), a federation of accrediting government agencies.

Worth noting is that the ASPAP, a non-stock national organization of colleges and universities offering public administration/management education programs, was established a decade earlier than AACCUP. Similar to NASPAA, the ASPAP is instrumental in enhancing the opening of more PA curricular programs in the country. Through its vast network of almost 120 schools, colleges, universities, and academic institutions offering PA and management programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels nationwide, it is currently considered as the major organization that has significantly led the development and improvement of PA and governance education in the country (Ricote, 2008 as cited in Reyes, 2010, p. 79). Despite ASPAP's strong presence and continuous support in the improvement of the quality of PA education in the country through the development of instructional materials, conduct of research and faculty development programs, among others, it has never been involved directly in the accreditation of PA programs.

Meanwhile, EAPAA was established in 1999, is the only QA authority in PA that is actively engaged in the accreditation of PA academic programs throughout Europe (EAPAA, 2013).

ICAPA, established in 2013, is the youngest among the four. Following the development of the Eight Standards of Excellence for PA Education and Training by the joint United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) Task Force in 2005, IASIA decided to establish the ICAPA to accredit PA programs worldwide (Rosenbaum, 2015).

### *3. Purpose of Agency*

All agencies operate with the common purpose of promoting the quality of PA degree programs through accreditation. These bodies also engage in the development of a set of appropriate accreditation standards in assessing the quality of PA programs. NASPAA, EAPAA, and AACUP have their respective quality standards, which will be discussed in rich detail in a separate section. ICAPA, on the other hand, adopted the UN/IASIA's Eight Standards of Excellence for Public Administration and Training Programs.

These agencies were also established to provide other services that will ensure excellence in PA education. ICAPA, for instance, provides expert consultancies to programs that are in developmental stage. NASPAA also offers sharing of best practices, networking, among others, to its member schools. Meanwhile, EAPAA serves as a platform for discussion on quality, accreditation, curriculum development, and innovation. Likewise, AACUP can, at the request of its member SUCs, provide consultancy services on accreditation and other related matters.

### *4. Collaboration*

Normally, accrediting agencies voluntarily join together to form networks and adhere to agreed principles and procedures (Martin & Stella, 2007). NASPAA, EAPAA, and AACUP are all members of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), a worldwide association of almost 300 QA agencies that promote excellence in higher education. Further, AACUP is further affiliated with regional QA networks such as the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN).

NASPAA, is an active member of the Council for Higher Education (CHEA), the sole national organization that recognizes and represents the views of the accrediting agencies in the US (El-Khawas, 2001). Meanwhile, upon CHEA's invitation in 2017, AACUP is included in the roster of institutional members of the CHEA International Quality Group.

The PA accrediting bodies are likewise affiliated with international professional organizations in the field of public governance. ICAPA and EAPAA are members of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), a worldwide professional association in the field of public governance established in 1930. Further, EAPAA is a member of the IASIA and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA), which are both international regional institutions under the IIAS. In the same manner, NASPAA collaborates with the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee) and Inter-American Network of Public Administration Education

(INPAE) in the advancement of public service education. It is worthy to note that ICAPA, NASPAA, and EAPAA have strong collaborations with one another in assuring the quality of PA education.

### *5. Scope of Activities*

Except for AACCUP, all surveyed agencies only accredit PA academic programs offered by their member HEIs. AACCUP, on the other hand, does not only accredit the PA degree programs but also other degree programs offered by the SUCs. It has likewise ventured into institutional accreditation in 2016.

An area of convergence among the agencies is that all are engaged in the accreditation of PA master's programs. Perhaps this can be partly attributed to the emphasis placed by these agencies on the master's level as an important mechanism in enhancing the professional capabilities of both current and future public servants. NASPAA only accredits PA master's degree programs while EAPAA provide accreditation services at the bachelor's and master's level. ICAPA and AACCUP have a much wider scope since both accredit all levels (undergraduate and graduate).

As of this writing, NASPAA has 202 accredited programs. EAPAA has 65 programs, while ICAPA has 11 programs accredited. AACCUP has seven institutionally accredited SUCs and 3,527 accredited programs excluding 514 programs on candidate status (AACCUP, n.d.)

### *6. Participation*

The educational institutions are under no obligation to apply their institution or their programs for accreditation. Albeit voluntary in nature, the advantages that come with accreditation provide an impetus for most institutions to undergo accreditation (Martin & Stella, 2007).

For one, accreditation provides a stamp of distinction to the institution or its curricular programs that a desired level of quality has been achieved. Since accreditation involves the evaluation by external peers based on a predetermined set of standards, the quality of the accredited institutions or programs is confirmed to students, employers, parents, and other stakeholders. Accreditation by NASPAA, EAPAA, and ICAPA enhances international recognition of excellence in the delivery of PA education.

In the Philippines, the accreditation by AACCUP is used by CHED as a criterion in the levelling of SUCs as well as the grant of Center of Excellence and Center of Development. Also, the benefits to be received by the HEIs depend on the accreditation level (CHED, 2005). Notwithstanding all the advantages,



accreditation remains voluntary due to the constitutional guarantee of academic freedom enjoyed by all HEIs as explicitly provided for in Article XIV, Section 5 (para. 2) of the 1987 Constitution. Further, the standards used by the accrediting bodies are beyond the minimum requirements set by the state. Thus, the HEIs have the option whether or not to undergo accreditation.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of PA Accrediting Agencies*

Profile	ICAPA	NASPAA	EAPAA	AACCUP
1. Ownership	independent	independent	independent	independent
2. Founding Date	2013	1970	1999	1989
3. Purpose of agency	Global accreditation of PA academic and training programs and consultancies.  Adoption of the Eight Standards of Excellence for PA Education and Training	Promotion of excellence in public service education through global accreditation of PA master's programs.  Development of accreditation standards	Improvement of the quality of European PA programs through accreditation.  Development of accreditation standards	Accreditation of curricular programs of Philippine state-funded HEIs.  Development of accreditation standards
4. Collaboration	UNDESA, IAS, NASPAA, EAPAA	CHEA, EAPAA, IASIA, NISPACee, INPAE, INQAAHE	EGPA, EASPA, NISPACee, IAS, IASIA, ICAPA, NASPAA, INQAA	ALCUCOA, NNQAA, APQN, INQAAHE, AQAN, CHEA
5. Scope of Activities	Public and private HEIs  Bachelor's, master's, Ph.D. in PA and training programs	Public and private HEIs  Master's degree in PA	Public and private HEIs  Bachelor's and master's degree in PA	Public HEIs or SUCs  Bachelor's, master's degree, and Ph.D. in PA and other academic programs
6. Participation	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary
7. Accreditation cost	Euro 4,000	USD 5,620 (initial) USD 4,587 (septennial)	Euro 5,000 accreditation or reaccreditation fee	PHP12,000 (preliminary survey visit) PHP20,000 to PHP24,000 (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> surveys) PHP26,000 (3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> surveys)

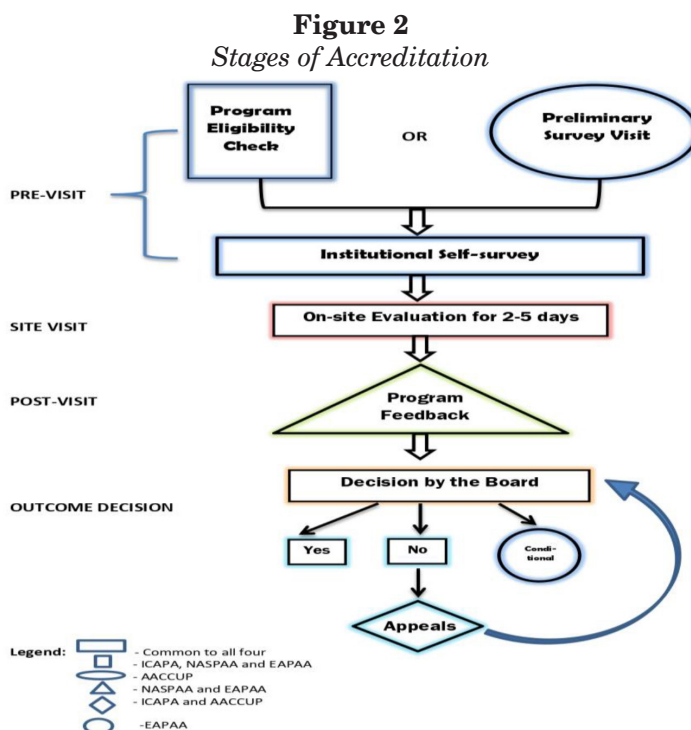


7. Accreditation Cost

The PA accrediting bodies require HEIs to pay for costs associated with accreditation. Generally, the travel costs, lodging, meals, and other incidental costs of the site visit team are to be shouldered by the program to be accredited. However, in the case of ICAPA, the accreditation fee already covers all of the above expenses during the site visit.

**Accreditation Process**

The PA accreditation models use the common three-stage process which are institutional self-study or self-assessment, on-site review by a team of accreditors, and decision by the commission/board. However, differences can be noted as illustrated in Figure 2 and in the succeeding discussion.



Source: Author’s own construction.

**Pre-Visit Stage**

During this stage, the programs or institutions undergo a preliminary check on the eligibility of the program for accreditation review based on certain conditions or requirements set by the accrediting agency.

For NASPAA, certain eligibility requirements have to be met before a program can apply for accreditation. These are: (a) the program must be a master's degree in public affairs/policy/administration; (b) the program must be a member in good standing of NASPAA; (c) the home institution must be regionally or nationally accredited or be recognized by the equivalent QA body in the country; (d) the program must have been in operation for at least four years to provide sufficient data for review, otherwise, if the program has not been in operation for four years, sufficiency of data to support evaluation must be assured; and (e) programs should have a core faculty of at least five full-time members, or their equivalent (NASPAA, 2009).

EAPAA also requires that the degree program must be a bachelor or master's level in public administration. The program should be located in any of the countries in Europe serviced by EAPAA. It also takes note of the program longevity to ensure that adequate data is available regarding the program and its graduates once the accreditation review starts. The eligibility check is waived for those programs that had been previously evaluated (EAPAA, 2013).

In contrast to NASPAA and EAPAA, the eligibility check of ICAPA already involves the submission of self-assessment report, which examines the status of their PA academic institutions or program based on specific criteria or benchmarks (Rosenbaum, 2015). After the program eligibility check, these international accrediting bodies inform the program whether it is eligible and can proceed to the accreditation review. A self-assessment process follows in which institutions have to complete a self-study report, which requires answers to qualitative questions specified in the self-assessment document. Additional information or clarification may be required from the accreditation applicant.

Unlike the other three cases, AACCCUP does not have an eligibility check after the educational institution has filed an application to undergo accreditation. The HEIs are aware though that only those academic programs that have produced graduates can be accredited. Further, not all degree programs can be submitted for accreditation as in the case of Law and Medicine for lack of survey instrument developed and approved by the accrediting body.

In lieu of the eligibility check, AACCCUP conducts a preliminary survey visit (PSV), which evaluates the programs for the first time and determines the extent to which it is ready for accreditation. This phase involves a more rigorous process in which a self-assessment report is prepared using a preliminary survey instrument that also looks into areas of evaluation similar to the higher levels of accreditation. Usually, a self-study committee or institutional accreditation team is constituted by the SUCs to evaluate their compliance to a predetermined set of standards or criteria by the AACCCUP.

The PSV simply awards the program with a candidate status to certify that it is capable of being accredited within two years. However, unlike ICAPA where there is no site visit required following the submission of a self-assessment report, the PSV of AACCUP involves a site visit by an external accreditor for two to three days or by two accreditors for one to two days. Depending on the grand mean obtained during the PSV, the program may be scheduled for the first survey visit (Level I) within six months or up to two years.

To expedite the accreditation process and save on cost on the part of the SUCs, AACCUP introduced in 2016 a new policy on program accreditation known as internal quality assurance system (IQAS). This means that strong SUCs that have met the qualifications set by AACCUP can already request a PSV of their respective academic programs. This trend to move the responsibility for QA back to educational institutions has been noted in a study of SEAMEO-RIHED (2012).

### **Site Visit**

This stage involves an on-site evaluation by a team of accreditors to assess the institution's or program's compliance to the standards set by the accrediting bodies. In all four cases, the site visitors examine documents, conduct an ocular inspection, and observe classes to validate the self-study report prepared by the institutional accreditation committee. Moreover, the team are expected to meet some relevant stakeholders, including faculty, administration, students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders.

There is, however, a slight difference in terms of the duration of the site visit. The NASPAA site evaluation lasts for only two and a half days while ICAPA lasts from two and a half to five days. EAPAA conducts its survey visit within two to three days while AACCUP lasts from three to four days.

### **Post Visit**

Following the site visit, the accrediting team will make a report regarding the performance of the program or institution. However, another point of divergence among the four cases is the presence or absence of a feedback mechanism as a way of providing the program with an opportunity to respond to the draft report of the site visit team. The NASPAA and EAPAA models provide the program with an opportunity to respond after the site visit. The institution is furnished a copy of the draft report for review or correction for possible misunderstanding or errors of fact. In case of factual errors, the site visit team can correct its report before a final evaluation report is forwarded to the accreditation committee.

The ICAPA accreditation process does not have a feedback mechanism that would have allowed the program to react to the draft report of the site

visit team. Likewise, the AACCUP accreditation process does not provide the program with an opportunity to give feedback to the report of the site visit team. Instead, on the last day of the site visit, an exit conference is held where the peer review team presents the salient findings and recommendations, including the strengths and weaknesses of the program under review to the officials of the institution. However, the decision on whether the program has passed or failed the accreditation is not yet revealed. What the review team comes up with are not the full findings and recommendations, as these have yet to go through, and be approved by, the AACCUP Board. After the presentation of the gist of the report, the officials of the institution are only allowed to give their response.

In the Philippine context, the feedback process is a necessary ingredient in the actual realization of democratic and participatory governance. For instance, in the area of local legislation, the *Sanggunian* acts on the policy inputs from various policy actors (NGOs, NGAs, experts, individual citizens) to formulate ordinances and resolutions and to respond to the demands of the physical and social environment (Iglesias, 2003). This means that it is important for the government to know the feedback or responses of the people regarding its policies and programs to promote the common good (Mercado, 2000).

Further, at the community-based level of governance, the community members embark on effective partnerships with the government as they collectively gather information, analyze the implications of the data gathered, formulate plans, and implement some of the projects. Also, at the monitoring and evaluation stages, the community members take part in making assessments and recommending ways to improve the implementation process or provide inputs for new programs and projects (Bautista, 2003).

Similarly, Maximo Kalaw (1997) emphasized that governing is about managing communication processes between people, between organizations, and also, between people and organization. When applied to the accreditation process, a feedback mechanism can, therefore, be an important tool for effectively managing communication between the program and the accreditors/accrediting bodies.

### **Outcome Decision**

Based on the self-study report, site visit team report, and reaction from the program, as in the case of NASPAA and EAPAA, the accreditation committee makes a final decision regarding accreditation. For instance, the AACCUP accreditors' report is forwarded to a technical review committee before being submitted to the AACCUP Board of Trustees for approval. The AACCUP Board deliberates on the report, makes the final decision, and takes the appropriate action. The AACCUP then submits the list of accredited programs or institutions

to its umbrella organization, the NNQAA. The NNQAA then certifies to the CHED that the programs or institutions have been accredited based on given standards and processes.

Generally, the outcome of accreditation comes with a 'yes' or 'no' decision; that is, the program or institution is either awarded or denied accreditation. EAPAA grants full or unconditional accreditation, which is valid for seven years. But in some instances, it awards conditional accreditation to programs valid for three years depending upon the time needed by the program to effect recommendations or changes. A second review will be conducted, and if possible, a second site visit made by the original team. The accreditation committee will then decide whether full accreditation will be granted (EAPAA, 2013).

No specific levels of accreditation are granted by the three international PA accrediting bodies. Further, the validity of accreditation is much longer with seven years for NASPAA and EAPAA and six years for ICAPA.

On the other hand, AACCUP requires programs to go through four levels of accreditation, with each level varying in requirements and degree of difficulty, to wit: Level I accredited status, Level II re-accredited status, Level III re-accredited status, and Level IV accredited status.

It can be observed that while EAPAA and NASPAA allow the applying institution to give feedback to the draft report of the site visit team, both models do not have a mechanism for appeals in case of denial of accreditation. Conversely, ICAPA and AACCUP do not have a feedback mechanism but allow the program or institution to submit a written appeal to the Board, which reviews the appeal and issues a final judgment.

Drawing from the foregoing discussion, the points of convergence and divergence among the four PA accreditation models are summarized in Table 2.

It can be noted that not all models employ a preliminary stage that checks on the eligibility of the program for accreditation review based on certain conditions or requirements set by the accrediting agency. For ICAPA, NASPAA, and EAPAA, the program applying for accreditation is required to submit an application form, which is reviewed by the secretariat or committee to determine eligibility. After the initial review, the program is informed whether it is formally eligible and can proceed to the accreditation review. No site visit is conducted during this stage of the accreditation process.

**Table 2**  
*Comparison of the Accreditation Process of the Four PA Models*

	Stages	ICAPA	NASPAA	EAPAA	AACCUP
Pre-Visit	Eligibility check	With eligibility requirements	With eligibility requirements	With eligibility requirements	with PSV
	Preliminary survey visit	with PSV	with PSV	with PSV	with PSV
	Institutional self-survey or self-assessment	Use of ICAPA's self-assessment document forms part of the eligibility check	Submission of the self-study report	Submission of a self-assessment report and other materials	Submission of a self-survey report
Site-Visit	On-site evaluation	2.5 to 5 days	2.5 days	2-3 days	3-4 days
Post-Visit	Programme feedback	with PSV	Program administrators respond to site visit reports	Program administrators give feedback to the site visit report	with PSV
Outcome Decision	Accreditation decision	'Yes' or 'No'	'Yes' or 'No'	* 'Yes' or 'No' * Conditional	'Yes' or 'No'
	Levels	with PSV	with PSV	with PSV	4 levels
	Validity period	6 years	7 years	7 years (full accreditation) 3 years (conditional)	2-5 years
	Appeal	With written appeal	with PSV	with PSV	With written appeal

In the case of AACCUP, the program eligibility check is embedded in the PSV, which determines the extent to which the program is ready for accreditation. This preliminary phase involves a relatively meticulous process as compared to the other models because the program to be accredited makes a self-assessment report, followed by a site visit by an external accreditor.

Moreover, the distinguishing feature of the NASPAA and EAPAA models, which cannot be found in the AACCUP model, is a formal feedback mechanism. The first two models allow the program to comment and give its feedback on the draft report of the site visit team before it is forwarded for final decision by the accrediting body. The AACCUP model, on the other hand, does not have this feedback process. Instead, the program is only allowed to give its response to the overview of the site visit team report, during the exit conference. The exit conference serves as a culminating activity of the survey visit where an overview of the team's report particularly on the program's strengths and areas needing improvement are read. Since only the gist of the report is presented to the faculty and administrators of the program being accredited, the opportunity to provide

feedback is limited. The same feature can be noted in the ICAPA model, which does not include a feedback process. Nevertheless, both AACCUP and ICAPA models, allow the program to submit a written appeal to the decision of the accrediting agency.

Moving on to the outcome decision stage, the NASPAA, EAPAA, and UN/IASIA models do not confer accreditation levels to the program, which means that only a “yes” or “no” decision is given. A longer validity period can also be observed in these international models as compared to AACCUP. This is different from the AACCUP accreditation process, where programs are required to go through various levels of accreditation. After one or two years, the program applies for Level I accreditation. If granted, the program will have to wait for three years before it can apply for Level II. This basically means that the program has to progress through the lower level (Levels I and II) before it can proceed to the higher levels of accreditation (Levels III and IV).

The aforementioned levels of accreditation are contained in CHED Memorandum Order No. 01, Series of 2005, entitled, “Revised Policies and Guidelines on Voluntary Accreditation in Aid of Quality and Excellence in Higher Education,” which provides corresponding benefits for each level, among many others. Notwithstanding these benefits per accreditation level, the entire process can be quite costly on the part of the SUCs since accreditation involves the preparation of documents and improvement of physical infrastructure, facilities, equipment, services, and others. This runs contrary to the principle of cost-efficiency and will become a big challenge for SUCs receiving only limited government funds for personal services, maintenance and other operating expenses, and capital outlay.

### **Accreditation Standards**

Standards are statements regarding specific targets or threshold levels of quality that must be met before being accredited. (Vlăsceanu et al., 2004). These are not only based on specific policies but are also the result of benchmarking against the best practices of different organizations or programs. Accrediting organizations form committees that would determine standards based on existing practices (Obille, 2007). Seemingly, this is what happened in the case of ICAPA.

Recognizing the need to improve governance and public administration standards, the UNDESA-DPADM, and IASIA in 2005 created a Task Force on Standards of Excellence for PA Education and Training. The Task Force was tasked to explore the possibility of crafting guidelines and standards to assist in the development of PA education and training institutions. In 2009, the Task Force’s final report, which contains eight standards to assess excellence in PA education and training, was accepted by the UNDESA-DPADM and



IASIA. Following the publication of the standards in various languages, many institutions availed of the standards as a tool for their own self-assessment activities (Rosenbaum, 2015).

Meanwhile, when NASPAA gradually moved toward becoming an accrediting agency for graduate programs in 1977, its members agreed on a set of standards (Clark & Menifield, 2005). Initially, the evaluation standards were mission-based, in which the teaching, research, and extension services are assessed relative to the program's mission.

However, developments in recent years placed more emphasis on two areas, namely, public service values and student competencies (van der Krogt, 2015). Publicservice values are defined as "values that, when acted on, manifest themselves as attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are crucial for serving the public in a manner that is consistent with those public values" (Molina, 2015, p. 21). These are character traits that are generally expected of public administrators. Meanwhile, the shift from objective-based (input-output) standards to a competency-based (outcome and performance-oriented) approach implies that curricula should focus on mastery of a specific set of competencies or capabilities (Kapucu, 2017). NASPAA specifically recommends that degree programs adopt competencies and align these with the program's mission and curricular content.

NASPAA played an important role in the creation of EAPAA. Thus, like NASPAA, the EAPAA model is mission-based that allows the organization and programs flexibility to develop their own specific profiles. There is no single model to be followed. EAPAA standards are also sensitive to the diversity of issues as well as to the availability of public information on the program and on the admission of students. Further EAPAA puts emphasis on the commitment of the program to quality improvement and innovation, among many others.

In the Philippines, it has been observed that accrediting agencies evaluate quality based almost entirely on detailed input criteria that reflect CHED's minimum standards (Phelps, 2001; Obille, 2007; Daffon, 2007). To enhance the effectiveness of the QA system and the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of higher education, CHED in 2012 introduced a paradigm shift from inputs-based to outcomes-based quality assurance (OBQA) system. The OBQA recognizes that while inputs are essential to the operation of a quality program, there is a need to examine the level at which the inputs and processes are able to achieve the desired outcomes. Consequently, the AACUP revised its survey instrument that now contains specific outcomes-based standards along the ten areas of evaluation.

**Table 3**  
*Categories of Standards for Accrediting PA Academic Programs*

van der Krogt's (2005) Categories	ICAPA	NASPAA	EAPAA	AACCUP
1 Strategy	Advocacy of public interest values*	Managing the program strategically*	Mission-based accreditation* Domain of public administration	Mission, goals and objectives
2 Program content	Public Service Commitment	Matching governance with the mission*	Curriculum Level Relation to practice and internships Student assessment	Curriculum and instruction*
3 Admission	Balancing collaboration and competition	Matching operations with the mission: serving students	Admission of students	Support to students*
4 Educational philosophy	A curriculum that is purposeful and responsive*	Matching operations with the mission: student learning*	Mission-based accreditation*	Curriculum and instruction*
5 Program management	Adequate resources are critical	Matching governance with the mission*	Program jurisdiction	Administration
6 Quality Management	A curriculum that is purposeful and responsive*	Managing the program strategically*	Quality improvement and innovation	Curriculum and instruction*
7 Faculty/Teaching staff	The faculty are central Inclusiveness is at the heart of the program	Matching operations with the mission: faculty performance	Faculty	Faculty Research
8 Facilities and support	Adequate resources are critical	Matching resources with the mission	Supportive services and facilities	Library Physical plant and facilities Laboratories
9 Student services	Advocacy of public interest values*	Advocacy of public interest values*	Student services Public relations	Support to students*

10	Performance	Advocacy of public interest values*	Managing the program strategically*	Curriculum	Curriculum and instruction*
11	Community service	Combining scholarship, practice, and community service	Matching operations with the mission: student learning*	Faculty*	Extension and community involvement

Note: \*These categories of standards contain specific criteria that can also be clustered in other categories by van der Krogt (2005).

Source: Rosenbaum (2015); <https://naspaaaccreditation.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/naspaa-accreditation-standards.pdf>; <http://www.eapaa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/EAPAAAccreditationCriteriaVersion9Jan2013.pdf> accessed on 12 February 2020; AACUP Graduate Survey Instrument (2014)

## Comparing the Accreditation Standards

A survey of the standards used by the three international models for PA shows more commonalities than differences among the models. ICAPA, which is the youngest among the three, adopts most of the standards used by NASPAA and EAPAA. Also, EAPAA standards resemble those of the NASPAA's, the latter being influential in the development of the former. All these models place great emphasis on public service values and student competencies, which are not explicit in the AACUP standards. However, a major concern in evaluating quality is which among the standards or criteria to use. Thus, this study finds it necessary to re-examine the current local standards to identify prospects for integrating the international models to the current evaluation standards used by the AACUP. As mentioned earlier, the standards were compared using van der Krogt's (2005) 11 categories of criteria.

### 1. Strategy

The strategy consists of standards that are related to the reasons of existence of the program, such as mission, objectives, target group(s), and stakeholder involvement (van der Krogt, 2005, p. 34). All models adopt mission-based accreditation, which stresses that the mission and objectives should be clearly stated, coherent, consistent, realizable, and that the objectives should articulate the competencies expected to be acquired by the graduates. The accrediting bodies recognize that students, alumni, faculty, and all other stakeholders should be involved in the formulation of the mission or objectives as well as in the program development and review process.

However, all but one have standards that require the target group(s) of the program to be clear. AACUP may include this kind of standard to help ensure that the program's mission, goals, objectives and curriculum content are consistent with the needs of its target clientele. For instance, some programs

target mid-career employees in the public sector while other programs are designed to meet the needs of academics and researchers.

## 2. Program Content

The program content broadly refers to the program and strategy, core courses or subjects in the curriculum, skills and attitudes being enhanced, and the assessment criteria and techniques being utilized.

In general, the four models put emphasis on program coherence such that the program should be in line with its objectives, target groups, and degree level. Further, the standards of the international PA accrediting bodies provide common curriculum components for the PA academic programs. Currently, AACUP's standards do not specify any curriculum components for the graduate PA programs, which may be due to the fact that there is no CHED memorandum order (CMO) that outlines the minimum requirements for the offering of graduate PA programs. Without the CMO, the AACUP cannot impose the inclusion of certain core courses in the curricular offerings. The standards only require that the master's programs have at least 36 units, inclusive of six units for thesis options or six integrating courses for non-thesis options. Although the AACUP model requires that all core courses be taught in the program, it is not content-specific on what the program curriculum must contain. The comparison is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Common Core Components of the PA Master's Program  
Across Four Models of Evaluation*

AACUP	NASPAA	EAPAA	UN/IASIA
None specified	Management of public service organizations	Thorough teaching of the basic concepts, theories, methods, and history (classics) of PA, either through courses in PA, or in the context of courses in the basic disciplines	Management of public service organizations
	Application of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis	Research methods, concepts, and theories from the disciplines of economics, law, political science, and sociology, as well as the relationship between these fields	Application of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis
	Understanding of public policy and organizational environment.	Public finances, informatization, and public management	Understanding of public policy and organizational environment.  Leadership in the public sector  Understanding public policy and organizational environment

Also, all cases place high premium on the acquisition of the necessary skills and attitudes by the students. However, the international PA accrediting bodies have more specific standards on the competencies expected of the graduates of the program. They all focus on producing professionals equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values that promote the highest standards of public service. NASPAA specifies the following competencies: the abilities (a) to lead and manage in public governance; (b) to participate in and contribute to the policy process; (c) to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions; (d) to articulate and apply a public service perspective; and (e) to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry (NASPAA, 2009, p. 7). In the same vein, the EAPAA highlights that the programme must be able “to produce professionals capable of intelligent, creative analysis and communication, and action in the public sector” (EAPAA, 2013, p. 6). The ICAPA standards also require that the programs help develop individuals who have knowledge of public sector ethos (i.e., democratic values, respect for human rights, social equity); acquired public sector skills (i.e., analytical and critical thinking, flexibility); and understood public sector nature (i.e., internationalization and globalization) (Rosenbaum, 2015, p. 318).

The AACUP model has a more generic orientation as its standards simply provide that the program must enable the students to acquire advanced knowledge and theories according to their field of specialization; apply theories to actual problems in the field; and demonstrate enhanced skills to carry out application or strategy in actual complex work settings (AACUP, 2014).

In all cases, the assessment of the performance of the students is integral in gauging the extent to which the students have acquired the intended learning outcomes. The assessment criteria and procedures must be clear and applied objectively to all students.

### *3. Admission*

The admission standards for all models provide that admission criteria and procedures are clear and publicly available. It is only EAPAA that require entrance requirements stating the differences for pre-service, in-service, or other types of students.

Meanwhile, the ICAPA looks into the selectivity rate or the ratio between the selected number of students who attended the program and the total number granted admission as well as the total number of applicants vis-à-vis total number of actual enrollees. The rest of the models do not have criteria on admission rate.

#### *4. Educational Philosophy*

Of the four cases, it is only EAPAA that requires that educational philosophy and mission of the program be clearly stated. Its standards further prescribe that the educational philosophy must be realized in a coherent manner such that, program objectives are formulated based from its mission and then translated into competencies or intended learning outcomes.

As to the other accrediting bodies, the standards related to educational philosophy are embedded in varying categories such as along mission, student learning, curriculum, and instruction. They further emphasize that the program objectives and outcomes should be consistent with the program mission.

#### *5. Program Management*

All models provide standards with regard to how the program is managed. The standards commonly provide that there should be a clear structure of responsibility and administration for the program. This implies that the faculty, staff, and administration have clear relationships and responsibilities. The AACCUP model is even more specific, as it provides for the required qualifications and experience needed for the effective administration of the program.

Additionally, common among the cases is the recognition that part of the responsibilities of those in charge of managing the program, including the faculty, is the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program mission and objectives, curriculum, assurance of program quality, and involvement of stakeholders in all related activities.

#### *6. Quality Management*

The criterion on quality management covers those standards that deal with the policies, mechanisms, and processes that assure the quality of the institution or program (van der Krogt, 2005). The continuous development of curriculum as a result of changes or recent developments exemplify efforts to enhance the quality of the program. Curriculum development forms part of the standards of all the surveyed cases, as they provide for the adequate system of monitoring and review of the program and the courses with the involvement of the students, faculty, administration, and other relevant stakeholders.

Another way of assuring quality is through the periodic measurement of the satisfaction of the students, alumni, and employers with the curriculum. It is only ICAPA and AACCUP that provide standards related to output/outcome assessment while NASPAA and EAPAA models do not have explicit standards or

criteria on this aspect.

### *7. Faculty/Teaching Staff*

In terms of quantity, the ICAPA model requires that the number of full-time faculty of the program should be at least four, although they could be more depending on the mission, size, and comprehensiveness of the program. The NASPAA and AACUP standards provide that there must be at least five core program faculty members while EAPAA standards simply mention of a sufficient number of regular faculty.

Meanwhile, ICAPA's minimum requirement for student-teacher ratio is one faculty member per 20 graduate-level students. AACUP standards provide that the faculty-student ratio should conform to the program requirements and standards set by the CHED while NASPAA and EAPAA require that the faculty should be sufficient to support the implementation of the program.

As to quality, all accrediting bodies require that the program faculty be academically qualified. They must have earned a doctorate degree or a terminal level degree in their field. Aside from this, the faculty should be actively engaged in research, the outputs of which are published in internationally recognized publications or refereed national or international journals.

However, the models differ when it comes to the criterion that the faculty handling the subject must have practitioner experience. The ICAPA standards consider that central to the fulfilment of program goals is the presence of faculty who possess both academic and practitioner experience. The model claims that the inclusion of both practitioners and academics ensures the integration of theory and practice and commitment to the highest standards of excellence in PA education. In the same manner, the EAPAA standards stress that practitioners handling courses must also be academically and professionally qualified. The AACUP and NASPAA models, on the other hand, only speak of "related professional experience" or "professionally qualified" as among other qualifications of the program faculty aside from relevant academic qualifications.

There are also other standards that help assure quality of the faculty, such as provisions for faculty development and faculty performance evaluation. In all cases, opportunities for professional development of the faculty members as well as well-established selection and promotion criteria and processes are available and ensured. Standards on the regular evaluation of the skills or performance of the faculty are present only in ICAPA and AACUP models.

Finally, respect to gender and minorities has been given utmost importance among EAPAA, NASPAA, and ICAPA models as shown in their respective



standards. This means that diversity and inclusiveness must be reflected in the population of the faculty or teaching staff. In contrast, AACCUP does not have specific standards related to social and cultural diversity.

### *8. Facilities and Support*

This category relates to the institutional aspect that is also considered vital to the excellent delivery of programs. All cases recognize that the presence of a clear, transparent, effective, and efficient financial management system and budgetary structure is critical to the successful implementation of the program. They also have standards that demand the availability, adequacy, and quality of facilities and services, including library, support staff, classrooms, instructional equipment, offices, and ICT facilities. Worth noting is that of all the accrediting bodies, AACCUP has a comprehensive list of requirements for physical infrastructures and services that are deemed essential for the effective delivery of curricular programs.

### *9. Student Services*

Common among all models are criteria and standards pertaining to services for students, which include providing the students with adequate and timely information about their progress, course requirements, and examinations. This entails returning checked and recorded examinations, quizzes, and other course requirements to the students to inform them of their performance.

In terms of grievances, the ICAPA standards require that institutions should have an adequate, fair, and accessible system for handling grievances among students, faculty, and administration while the AACCUP standards underscore the need to establish a grievance committee to ensure due process in matters relating to student misconduct. EAPAA and NASPAA do not have standards with respect to grievances.

Meanwhile, except for AACCUP, details on the tasks, objectives and structure, specific programs offered and their costs, awards, and overall performance of the program are provided. The AACCUP standards do not specifically require similar information about the program. Rather, it only requires programs to disseminate the vision, mission, goals and objectives to students, faculty, and other stakeholders from the different agencies, industry sector, and others.

### *10. Performance*

Based on this category, evaluation of the performance of the programmes can be done through the following: (a) measuring the competencies attained by the graduates; (b) assessing the level of satisfaction of the students, alumni, and

employers; (c) comparison of the performance of the program with that of other high performing organizations; and (d) obtaining assessments of organizations for whom the individuals are being educated.

The ICAPA and NASPAA models advance the use of all the aforementioned mechanisms to assess the performance of organizations. More specifically, the standards provide that the stakeholders' satisfaction with the program should be measured regularly. This includes securing assessments by the organizations where the graduates are employed. The assessment results are then used to make adjustments to the program to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness. Meanwhile, the EAPAA standards include an assessment of whether the graduates meet the intended learning outcomes of the program. There was no mention of the assessment of program performance by other stakeholders.

The AACUP model also measures the performance of the program by obtaining feedback from employers regarding performance of graduates. Although there are no direct statements with respect to measuring the satisfaction of students and alumni with the program, in practice, the accrediting team invites these sectors for an interview to obtain their views regarding the program.

### *11. Community Service*

This category includes those standards that pertain to the programme's relationship with the community. Community service reflects the commitment of the program faculty and administration to public service. All models have standards requiring the integration of community service in the curriculum and the involvement of the faculty service activities. The adequacy of resources, including facilities, is also considered critical to the successful implementation of community service activities.

Notably, the AACUP model includes standards on extension and community involvement under Area VI of the survey instrument, which specifically requires that the administration, faculty, and students be involved in the planning, organization, implementation and dissemination of extension programs. The local model also recognizes that the use of monitoring and evaluation instruments, adequacy of budget, extension staff, facilities and equipment, supplies and materials, among others, help ensure the effective implementation of the extension program. The impact of the extension program on the community is also measured through the use of monitoring and evaluation instruments.

## Conclusion

The accreditation process of the three international PA accrediting bodies conduct an initial check on the eligibility of the program for accreditation review simply on the basis of the report submitted by the program. On the contrary, the AACCCUP employs a PSV of the program to be accredited. Moreover, the distinguishing feature of the NASPAA and EAPAA models is the presence of a formal feedback process where the program has the opportunity to respond to the draft report. Although the ICAPA and AACCCUP models do not have a feedback mechanism, both allow the program to file an appeal.

Common to the NASPAA, EAPAA and ICAPA models is the absence of accreditation levels, which means that only a “yes” or “no” decision is given. Once accredited, however, the programs enjoy a relatively longer validity period (six to seven years) as compared to AACCCUP (two to five years). The AACCCUP accreditation process, on the other hand, requires academic programs to progress through four levels of accreditation, implying that at the end of the validity period, the program has to apply again for higher levels of accreditation.

In terms of standards, all models accredit programs based on their mission. However, the standards of the international PA accrediting bodies provide greater emphasis on public service values and student competencies. The AACCCUP standards have a more generic orientation and do not have specific criteria relative to public service and learning competencies. The examination further reveals that AACCCUP standards contain most of standards of the international PA models except for the following: target groups, core courses or subjects, social and cultural diversity, and quality of teaching by practitioners.

The AACCCUP does not have a program-specific survey instrument for the graduate PA programs partly due to the absence of a program-specific CMO. Instead, what it uses is a generic instrument for graduate education program that contains generic standards or benchmark statements of quality. Therefore, some of the standards may not be applicable to the graduate PA program and may not be able to consider the nature of PA as an applied discipline.

## Recommendations

The study proposes that in the AACCCUP accreditation process, an opportunity be given to the program to provide feedback on the draft report of the peer review team prior to its submission to the AACCCUP Board for final decision. The AACCCUP may also look into the possibility of simply awarding a “yes” or “no” decision and providing a longer validity period so that the program need not go through four levels of accreditation thereby speeding up the accreditation process.

Further, the development of a program-specific survey instrument will help address the peculiarity of the PA discipline as a multidisciplinary and applied field. In the process of developing the survey instrument, the AACCU may invite experts on the field of PA, obtain the perceptions of relevant professional organizations (i.e., Philippine Society for Public Administration or PSPA, Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines or ASPAP, etc.), and collaborate with representatives of the various organizations where the graduates of the program are employed.

Drawing from van der Krogt's (2005) categories of standards, the following quality standards are proposed to be included in the AACCU survey instrument for graduate PA programs: (a) for strategy, standards requiring that the target group(s) of the program must be included; (b) for faculty/teaching staff, standards on teaching by practitioners must be provided; (c) with regard to performance, standards that measure satisfaction of students and alumni with the program must be stated explicitly; and (d) in terms of program content, the competencies expected of the graduates of the program must be specified. This further means that the instrument should also integrate the standards that support the development of public sector skills and values that are essential in the improvement of public service delivery.

Further research may be conducted on the possibility of developing common accreditation standards for PA academic programs among the five local accrediting bodies. CHED, through the federation or network of accrediting agencies, may take the lead in harmonizing the quality standards used in evaluating PA academic programs offered by both public and private HEIs.

As with all other adaptations of an international model of quality assurance or accreditation, there is a need to examine the model's adaptability to the specific local conditions of the country where it is to be applied. Hence, future research is needed to investigate the various factors, including the sociocultural context, to be taken into account prior to the adaptation of the international PA standards to the quality standards used in evaluating PA academic programs by Philippine accrediting bodies.

Finally, it has been noted that in other countries the professional organizations that ensure excellence in Public Administration education are also engaged in the accreditation of PA academic programs of their member institutions. This is the case of NASPAA in the US and EAPAA in Europe. Both have full-time staff and budget. In the Philippines, the ASPAP may play an essential role in the accreditation of the PA academic programs of its member HEIs. It is therefore recommended that a study be conducted to determine whether it is possible for ASPAP to metamorphose into an accrediting institution for PA academic programs in the country.

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