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Accidental Registrar: A Look Back

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Even before my retirement a little over a year ago, I had been thinking of writing something about my fifteen years in the registrar's office at Oregon State University. Many things came to mind as I neared my last day, but perhaps the most persistent thought was how accidental it had been that I ever became a registrar in the first place.

Even before my retirement a little over a year ago, I had been thinking of writing something about my fifteen years in the registrar's office at Oregon State University. Many things came to mind as I neared my last day, but perhaps the most persistent thought was how accidental it had been that I ever became a registrar in the first place.

Prior to applying for the position of Special Programs Manager, I had limited interaction with registrar offices and had given approximately zero thought to ever working in one. I had a rudimentary idea of what registrars did, but I had no idea what one did to prepare to work in a registrar's office. Had I known that the answer to that question is so far unanswered, I would have been a little more assured.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, roughly equivalent to the Iron Age in registrar geologic terms, I had registered as an undergraduate via the spectacle known as arena registration. To my bewildered undergraduate psyche, the process had the same easy-to-follow steps that exist in photosynthesis, calculus, international diplomacy, and literary criticism. Only with punch cards. Incredibly, though, it worked.

As a graduate student a decade later, I registered via telephone, roughly the Bronze Age in registrar office geologic terms; and as an adjunct instructor at university and community college, I discovered the registrar's office was one of my best professional friends. It was vital in a mysterious and wonderful way, providing me with class lists at the beginning of the semester, and notifications of adds, drops, and withdrawals throughout the term. At the end of every semester, I supplied grades, first via Scantron sheets (another Iron Age feature), and then through the miracle of online grading (a true miracle if there ever was one). I could go to the registrar's office for any question

remotely connected to my class, from the start date of the term to the location of the parking lot nearest my classroom.

With such a minimal understanding and interaction with the form and function of a registrar's office, the question why I applied to work in one seems reasonable. I have often asked myself that question, hoping that continued thought would produce an epiphany, and I could then assure myself that I knew what I was doing and what to expect when I applied at OSU. I am confident that I am closing in on the answer and will shortly be satisfied with the explanation. That, however, is still a work in progress. Though I am not yet certain of the reason(s) that prompted me to become a registrar, I can say without hesitation or qualification that I am glad I did.

Those who worked with me over the fifteen years at OSU may be surprised to hear that I claim to be happy with my decision. But my frustrations, complaints, protests, and temporary unhappiness from time-to-time pale in comparison to the great relationships I had with fabulous colleagues, the support and encouragement I received from the three university registrars I worked for, and the thousands of kindnesses from students, faculty and staff, and the unstinting wonders that I witnessed daily from co-workers in the office. Each day was an adventure, or at the very least a potential adventure.

I knew from the first that I had a lot to learn, and often was in uncharted waters, particularly when I talked with students and listened to plights that were at odds with my own dull, normal undergraduate experience. In my first encounter trying to understand an account of a particular difficulty (the details of which are lost to me now), I can remember only looking blankly at the student and asking, with what I hoped was a sympathetic tone, "Why did you do that?" Somehow, we arrived at a plan that addressed the difficulty, with some pain to everyone involved, probably. Other meetings with students dealt with a wide range of traumas: some were relatively benign issues, such as missed drop deadlines; others were issues that involved difficult decisions by the students to withdraw from the term, or withdraw from a course, possibly impacting degree progress. In time, I became more comfortable with the meetings, and more assured of how to deal with the issues. At one point, I discovered that for all but the most traumatic instances, and in some cases even for those, I had progressed from asking "Why did you do that?" to stating, usually with confidence, "I think I have a form for that."

I was ecstatic with some of those adventures, wary and unsure of others, and frustrated and angry at a small number. Unfortunately, the small number of frustrations loomed large in the moment; fortunately, they have

diminished over time, leaving me with an appreciation for the good fortune and opportunity I had over those years.

Looking back at a career that I didn't consciously prepare for, or even know existed until I was in it, is a fascinating remembrance, and after retirement, I hope somewhat explainable. Working with faculty members on scheduling, room assignments, and final exam scheduling helped me understand the day-to day challenges that faculty and departments faced, and helped them understand that scheduling for the entire university is a master puzzle that involves consideration of every college and department across the university. Helping students understand the academic regulations and the purpose behind them, and in particular notions such as academic residency, repeat rules, truncated (rather than rounded) GPA, degree audits, FERPA, academic suspension and why it was never because of one class or one teacher, helped me to understand those regulations and our processes, and helped students, I think, to take a careful view of their role in their education. Participating in and contributing to OSU

commencement – a complex, interconnected, and dynamic process that is a time of joy, celebration, and sometimes frustration – reinforced why it was great to work in the registrar's office. Finally, I hope that my work and conversations with students, faculty, and parents helped them understand that I had no interest, ever or in any way, of ruining their lives.

Those remembrances, challenges, frustrations, and successes are what I had in mind when I proposed to write about my experiences and observations, titled *The Accidental Registrar*, to the editors of the PACRAO Review.

An explanation of how I found myself in the OSU Registrar's Office, and how I faced the issues and challenges of the jobs I held, how I was helped, and why I didn't run away, is what I am interested in relating. If it makes sense to readers, then I am probably confused and have remembered events selectively; if it seems to be a chronicle of how miraculous it is that my career as a registrar lasted as long as it did, then I have told the true story.

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The Regulatory Triad and United States Higher Education

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U.S. higher education has a design that is unique in the world, and a primary reason for this unique design is the mixture of governmental and non-governmental agencies providing oversight that form the regulatory triad. The so-called "regulatory triad" in U.S. higher education consists of oversight by accrediting agencies, state governments, and the federal government (Field, 2013), As higher education professionals, a review of the historical development of the triad within U.S. higher education, the factors that have led to the creation of the regulatory triad, the role the regulatory triad currently plays in U.S. higher education, and current ways the triad affects U.S. higher education today is helpful in understanding the influence of the triad on our daily jobs and why we are required to balance competing priorities based on the relationship among these three entities. This brief review provides awareness on how the triad has evolved and changed through the years of development in U.S. higher education to meet the needs of the public, and how the triad has been a driver in the evolution on how colleges and schools conduct themselves and operate, to provide clarity on the complex environment we operate in and why we carry out our roles in the manner which we do.

United States (U.S) higher education stands unique among the world for its size and structure in order to meet the diverse needs of its students and constituents (Eckel and King, 2011). In some respects, U.S. higher education has stood as a model for other countries to emulate when tackling the challenges of their own higher education systems (Eckel and King, 2011). Although U.S. higher education is not without its flaws, one of the hallmarks of U.S. higher education is its system of quality assurance through multiple regulatory bodies. The so-called "regulatory triad" in U.S. higher education consists of oversight by accrediting agencies, state governments, and the federal government (Field, 2013), all holding different roles in the institutional oversight process. The regulatory triad as it consists today has emerged over the centuries of development and evolution in U.S. higher education and has had an influence on the philosophical, political, and financial design of higher education in the U.S. To investigate the influence of the regulatory triad on the

infrastructure of U.S. higher education it is helpful to review the historical development of the triad within U.S. higher education, the factors that have led to the creation of the regulatory triad, the role the regulatory triad currently plays in U.S. higher education, and current ways the triad affects U.S. higher education today.

Historical Development of U.S. Higher Education and the Regulatory Triad

The roles that the federal government, state governments, and accrediting agencies play in U.S. higher education are still evolving and have been partially defined by the historical development of the United States. Geiger (2011) indicates that there have been approximately ten generations in the development of United States higher education. During these generations of development the basic roles for each part of the regulatory triad were defined, and, in the case of accreditation, a generational need defined the creation of it. Although each generation has influenced the regulatory triad in some manner, for the purposes of this investigation a historical review of a few of the most salient time periods that have affected the development of the regulatory triad will be reviewed.

Colonial Higher Education Period (1636-1783)

When conducting a review of higher education in America, a good starting point is during the colonial period. The first colleges in America were religious-affiliated chartered institutions receiving subsidies that consisted of some of the well-known Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Yale (Johnson, Musial, Hall & Gollnick, 2011). As the colonies expanded, so did the number of institutions with the creation of more private institutions that would become known as Princeton, Columbia, Penn, and Brown among others (Geiger, 2011).

The colonial time period is relevant to the creation of the regulatory triad because although many of the colonial institutions were private, they were also subject to colonial intervention. To establish an institution during colonial time, schools were required to obtain a charter, and the process of issuing charters was used to control the growth or expansion of institutions (Bennett, 2014). Moreover, these colleges were eligible for subsidies, grants, or tax exemptions from their provincial governments (Bennett, 2014). Even though these institutions were given academic autonomy to provide education consistent with their religious roots and operate on a private basis, a relationship was formed between the college and its respective colony, which required the institution to balance internal needs versus communal needs (Geiger, 2011). As Bennett (2014) points out, the thought that colonial institutions were free from external influence of the government and were able to act as free-market entities prior to the revolution is a myth.

Post-Revolutionary War Period (1783-1812)

The post-Revolutionary War period in higher education is critical in the development of U.S. higher education as it largely defined the roles of the state and federal government. When the Constitution was drafted in 1787 it did not define a direct responsibility for the oversight of education by the federal government (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). Perhaps due to the pre-existing provincial support system that sponsored and assisted the colonial institutions, and likely as an avenue to ensure the sovereign rights of the newly formed states, the control for educational laws and institutional approvals was left to the states, where it basically remains today (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). With this newly granted authority many states took it upon themselves to either alter the operating conditions for colleges within their jurisdictions or create new public institutions of instruction (Geiger, 2011).

The separation of roles between the federal government and state governments has greatly influenced the formation of higher education in the U.S. Although the states were given a large portion of the responsibility for educating the nation, it is inaccurate to think the federal government has ever taken a hands-off approach. Even in the early post-Revolutionary War period, the federal government was keenly aware of the importance of education and looked to provide support resources to inject life into specific educational initiatives without usurping the oversight of institutions maintained by state governments (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). Philosophically, this sentiment still exists today, but over time as more federal resources have been injected into higher education initiatives, the influence of the federal government has grown.

Antebellum and Postbellum Transformation (1812-1890)

Over the next 80 years in U.S. higher education the role and place of the university continued to be in transition with questions asked about the private versus public nature of education and the role of education as a professional or industrial enterprise. As the nation grew and expanded, so did the sentiment that education needed to be a lever to facilitate this growth through both agricultural and industrial means (Geiger, 2011). As a direct result, a notable action taken by the federal government to spur the creation of new institutions occurred in the form of the Morrill Land Grant Act to advance the needs of a quickly growing nation that needed a more educated population (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). Although, the first Morrill Land Grant Act was slightly premature in its timing (Geiger, 2011), it demonstrated an important dynamic for how the federal government could wield its influence

and resources to promote the growth of education within states while still not creating a national system.

The Birth of the Modern System (1890-1940)

As the economic prowess of the nation boomed during the turn of the last century, so did the investment in education by the states (Goldin and Katz, 1999). An educational landscape once dominated by private institutions started to see the rise of large public institutions of instruction and research universities (Goldin and Katz, 1999). By nature of this growth and as a need to maintain quality and facilitate student mobility a need to standardize emerged (Geiger, 2011). In response to the need to standardize, some staples found today in U.S. higher education, such as the Carnegie unit for credit and four-year degree design, emerged during this time (Geiger, 2011), as well as something else uniquely American called accreditation.

Although loose associations of colleges and schools began to form prior to 1890, the role of accreditation as a peer-reviewed quality assurance system did not fully begin to be realized until after 1890 (El-Khawas, 2001). As a response to an evolving nation with an increasingly transient population, these associations realized a need to ensure uniform standards existed in order to facilitate appropriate secondary instruction for admission purposes and prevent academic quality from suffering during a time of expansive growth (El-Khawas, 2001). As an entity that existed outside of federal or state control these associations were free to foster the diversity of institutions and also establish standards that promoted academic autonomy, while also providing basic qualifications for standardization. Over this time period, a quality assurance mechanism began to form, where each member could be counted upon to meet certain quantitative standards and, therefore, be considered a reputable institution if its graduates entered the professional field or went on to further studies. As a more thoughtful nation began to emerge after World War I, accreditation began to evolve as well by looking at institutions qualitatively in determining if the school was meeting the holistic needs of its students, community, mission and stated purpose; and these qualitative characteristics remain hallmarks of the process today (El-Khawas, 2001).

Reaching Massification (1940-1975)

As the world recovered from its Second World War, the U.S. higher education system had to adjust to changing socio-economic conditions and global needs. Investment in education expanded greatly during this time from both a state and federal level. Faced with millions of returning soldiers the federal government stepped in with the GI Bill, and as a result institutional enrollment increased at an unexpected exponential rate (Geiger, 2011). Moreover, with baby boomers filling classrooms for multiple generations, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 opening up

access for African American students, U.S. higher education was set to experience sustained enrollment growth for decades (Geiger, 2011).

As a result of the enrollment boom, state investment in education increased leading to the rise of flagship public state institutions. Bolstered by research grants flowing directly from the federal government to the institutions in order to maintain the United States' position as a world leader (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010), these flagship public universities became more selective (Geiger, 2011). Consequently, faced with a continually rising student demand and capacity or selectivity issues at universities, the states began creating public community colleges to tackle vocational and broader educational needs (Geiger, 2011). In the interim, accrediting agencies had to adapt their evaluation practices to follow suit with a focus on institutional quality and standardization as more institutions were created (El-Khawas, 2001), further entrenching their relationships with the state and federal government as the quality assurance mechanism for the burgeoning system.

Regulatory Evolution (1975- Current)

The 1970s are a notable period in U.S. higher education as it reflects a shift in the role of the federal government in higher education, which defines many aspects of the regulatory triad as it exists today. With the changes to the Higher Education Act occurring during the 1970s the federal government became entrenched in the oversight of higher education by increasing student aid programs and enhancing regulations associated with institutional participation in aid programs to provide better controls such as FERPA or Title IX (Geiger, 2011). These changes began to drive new behaviors in institutions and the states as a result of these new revenue sources. Institutions began to increase tuition and student fees to enhance education programs and were able to account for these costs on the basis of students having more access to assistance (Geiger, 2011). Access to greater aid in the form of loans also allowed for private institutions to increase their presence, and as a corollary the states began a process of de-investment in higher education (Geiger, 2011). The resulting shift in financial strategies caused by increased access to aid generated a greater reliance on federal aid programs and as a consequence increased the influence of the federal government on institutions (Geiger, 2011).

Accreditation's role was also affected by these changes as accreditation became a critical component for institutional access to aid programs. This aspect of the Higher Education Act became a major impetus to defining the points of the regulatory triad, as the conditions for an institution to be eligible to participle in federal aid programs are that the institution must be approved in the state which it operates and that the institution also be accredited

by a body recognized by the federal government (El-Khawas, 2001). The triangulation of these bodies has created the current environment that institutions must operate in and as a consequence has increased the regulatory scrutiny and amount of regulations institutions are subject to as these bodies attempt to work together to carry out their very different and distinct roles.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Regulatory Triad

As indicated, the roles of the regulatory triad have evolved over the almost two-and-a-half centuries of U.S. higher education. Although, from a high-level perspective the states, federal government, and accrediting agencies all still fill the obligations set forth as originally intended, these roles have changed and become more complex in the current environment. To gain perspective on the how the regulatory triad influences U.S. higher education it is useful to clarify the current roles and responsibilities of each component of the triad.

State Roles and Responsibilities

The most diverse component of the regulatory triad is the individual states. Because each state is responsible for the execution and approval of educational programs and initiatives within its borders there are numerous variations and differences that exist state to state. From a structural standpoint each state legislature has created at least one committee to handle decisions and recommendations on education matters

(Fowler, 2013), and from there the names and players that handle the oversight, policy making, and institutional approvals differ state to state. Although the exact names and exact responsibilities for higher education policy making and management differ state by state, each state does have a board, department, agency or other authorized entity to carry out the functions for higher education oversight. Even with these differences it is best to sum up the role of the state to manage the approval of higher education institutions that operate within its borders, establish the rules and regulations that govern both public and private institutions as a condition to continue operating within these borders, create programs to support higher education initiatives, and allocate funding to be disbursed to institutions from public funds.

Because states levy policies for public and private institutions, state regulatory codes may create different bodies or codes to handle the oversight of each. An example of this can be found in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Act § 61.302 that defines an institution of higher education as a public entity and conversely defines private institutions as those that do not meet the definition of an institution of higher education as set forth in this code (Higher Education Coordinating Act, 2015). A separation in state code between institution types is not uncommon and allows the state to create

differing regulations to manage higher education entities within its borders. Ultimately, states are the gatekeepers that permit institutions to conduct business within its jurisdiction, and states have the most control in determining if an institution can continue operating from a regulatory standpoint.

Accrediting Agency Roles and Responsibilities

As previously presented accreditation began as a process to share best practices and create consistency between institutions, but accreditation has emerged to become the independent quality review process in U.S. higher education. Accreditation today provides four main functions: to provide quality assurance, to act as one of the gatekeepers providing access to federal funding, to instill confidence by the pubic in the output of students from institutions, and to create a sense of reciprocity among institutions sharing students (Eaton, 2009). Although accrediting agencies can accredit institutions or programs, it is the institutional accrediting bodies that make up the second leg of the regulatory triad because of their interplay with the federal government's aid programs. Accreditation holds a unique spot in global higher education as it is not a governmental entity and has long been considered part of the reason that U.S. higher education has grown to consist of

a collection of very diverse and academically autonomous institutions (Eaton, 2009).

In the United States the two most prominent institutional accrediting bodies are separated into regional and national agencies. Although not always true, regional bodies primarily accredit colleges and universities with a broad degree-granting educational focus, mostly private and non-profit institutions; whereas, national bodies accredit career, technical, and vocational institutions (Eaton, 2009). Because of the differences in these bodies diversity exists among these agencies, but common threads emerge when looking at the goals of these agencies. For example, the Higher Learning Commission's guiding values place an emphasis on student learning and continuous improvement (Higher Learning Commission: 2016 Resource Guide, 2016), and in the WASC Senior Colleges and Universities Commission standards of accreditation a commitment to student learning and success and a commitment to quality and improvement exists (2013 Handbook of Accreditation, 2013).

Because accreditation provides an avenue to access additional funding sources and stands to serve as a seal of quality for an institution, it is something that higher education institutions take very seriously. As a result, institutions have begun to invest funds in administrative staff to handle relationships with accrediting agencies

and also work through continuous improvement matters that arise out of accreditation requirements. The role accreditation has played in higher education has been somewhat fluid over the years depending on the needs of institutions, the government, or the public, but the role has become a constant in the oversight for higher education institutions in the U.S. (El-Khawas, 2001).

Federal Government Roles and Responsibilities

Because the federal government is a singular entity it does not contain some of the challenges that exist because of the differences created by the diversity in the various state or accrediting agency rules and regulations. However, this is not to indicate that the federal government's role in higher education is not robust or complex. Over the past 50 years the federal government has taken a much more active role in higher education mostly through the administration of funding support in order to increase student access or institutional research (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). It is through the lever of financial support that the federal government has broadened its influence on higher education, even though it is not granted direct controls over education for the country.

A complicated web has been woven by the federal government in order to exert its authority, and most often has come in the form of regulations by which institutions must abide by in order to gain access to funding. Whether by universal regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act or by very specific education-centric regulations such as Title IX or FERPA, the federal government has created numerous codes which institutions must navigate in order to retain access to federal funding (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010). To manage the expanse of regulations a central Department of Education was created, but this entity does not have oversight for all educational programs within the government (Gladieux, Hauptman and Knapp, 2010); as different government agencies like the Department of Homeland Security has oversight for the student exchange and visitor program, and the Department of Defense handles military student benefits.

With the implementation of the Higher Education Act (HEA) – and its subsequent reauthorizations – the regulatory triad emerged. The HEA outlines in 34 C.F.R. § 600.4 (2016) the eligibility criteria that institutions must meet to participate in federal aid programs to include state authorization and institutional accreditation for federal purposes as "reliable authorities regarding the quality of education or training offered by the institutions or programs they accredit" (34 C.F.R. § 602.1, 2016, p. 2). It is through these codes that the triad becomes connected,

and the current complex regulatory ecosystem is formed.

Effect of the Triad on Modern U.S. Higher Education

Although the regulatory triad has been an important component of making U.S. higher education a world leader through the promotion of a diverse system with high-quality institutions; it has also affected how institutions operate within the triad and caused some complexities. Two notable ways the triad has recently affected institutions is by creating an increasingly complex regulatory environment and altering how accrediting agencies carry out their functions. Because of the influence of the triad on institutional funding systems, institutions are facing similar problems and are required to find answers to common challenges around ensuring student learning outcomes are met in an environment where fiduciary responsibility is becoming increasingly important (Eckel and King, 2011).

Complex Regulatory Environment

With the rise of the triad, an increase in the amount of regulations an institution has to manage has occurred. The current regulatory environment has become a talking point for institutions as a barrier to innovation. As reported in a 2013 survey of college and university presidents by *Inside Higher Ed,* presidents do not see this trend letting up (Lederman and Jaschik, 2013). With the tension that is created by the triad on institutions, some institutions have sought ways to decrease government and

regulatory controls to increase institutional autonomy (Eckel and King, 2011), but because of the complex financial ecosystem within the current environment this is no easy task. To its credit the federal government has recognized that the current environment is too complex and has held hearings in advance of modifying the HEA (Field, 2013), but a re-authorization of the HEA is yet to emerge.

Institutional expansion is often stifled by the amount of regulations with which an institution must work with as well. Because each state has jurisdiction over education within its borders this means each state has the right to regulate the import and export of educational services (Lane, Kinser, and Knox, 2013). In essence what is created is a web of laws and rules that an institution must manage if it wishes to offer instruction in a different jurisdiction from its home state, which by virtue of creating additional variables adds to institutional complexity. Institutions found to be noncompliant of state regulations can be held liable for damages if offering services at an unapproved site, even if the institution has obtained appropriate approvals in their home state or jurisdiction (Lane, Kinser, and Knox, 2013).

As a consequence, institutions now devote greater resources to the creation of internal legal, compliance, and regulatory departments to manage the complexity of the triad. Even though the U.S. system has been characterized

by its desire for limited government controls, the influence of a heightened regulatory environment will not decrease as long as institutions continue to have a large dependency on federal aid programs (Mumper, Gladieux, King, and Corrigan, 2011). As a result, schools will continue to try to meld the demands of the triad with their own institutional mission and goals, which will continue to create an inherit tension among these bodies.

Changes in the Role of Accrediting Agencies

The newest leg of the triad has also been the entity that has experienced the most transformation over the last 30 years. As discussed, accreditation began as an independent entity to create standardization and best-practice sharing among universities (El-Khawas, 2001; Hall, 2012). However, what has emerged is a body that is now pressured to promote quality assurance and accountability across institutions and ensure consumer protections are in place (Eaton, 2010; El-Khawas, 2001; Hall, 2012). Although accreditation is considered a non-governmental process, accreditation's ties to higher education on a local and federal level have created some legal challenges to its role as a state-actor (Toma and Palm, 1999). Many of these challenges have not held up in court, but legally what is important for accrediting agencies is that they follow their outlined criteria, rules, and standards for accreditation (Toma and Palm, 1999).

It is the criteria, rules, and standards for accreditation that have evolved recently which have affected colleges and universities. Through the federal government's call for accreditation to take a more direct stance on accountability and student protections it has created a change in the criterion used for accreditation. For example, in 2012 the Higher Learning Commission created a set of Assumed Practices intended to be objective in nature that act as a standard framework for accountability for an institution (Higher Learning Commission, 2016). This list of objective criteria acts almost like minimum standards for an institution and is a departure from the more collegial and subjective process that has largely defined accreditation.

Another example can be found in the shift of standards made by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in 2001 when WASC updated its criteria for review. With these changes WASC focused more on operational aspects of the institution and gave latitude to the institution to define what areas of performance the institution would showcase to demonstrate how the institution fulfills its institutional obligations and objectives (Ewell, 2011). Part of this change required a transition to an evidence-based practice to hold institutions accountable, while also trying to maintain a process that respected the individuality of each institution (Ewell, 2011). This shift in how accrediting agencies approach the

accreditation process can cause complications for institutions as they adjust to new requirements and processes and attempt to build evidence or procedures to meet criteria for continued accreditation.

Conclusion

U.S. higher education has a design that is unique in the world, and a primary reason for this unique design is the mixture of governmental and non-governmental agencies providing oversight that form the regulatory triad. The triad has evolved and changed through the years of development in U.S. higher education to meet the needs of the public and institutions, but has also been a driver in the evolution on how colleges and schools conduct themselves and operate. Although the regulatory triad is not perfect, it has become an indelible part of the infrastructure of U.S. higher education that has allowed the flexibility for institutions to grow, diversify, and provide a comparatively high quality product to its constituents on a mass basis.

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Marc Booker is the Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Implementation at University of Phoenix, and has worked in higher education for over 17 years in a variety of admissions, training, and student support roles.

Marc is actively engaged in the higher education community and has served PACRAO in many capacities including holding the honor of being the 2016 President for the Association. Since 2009, Marc has been a regular speaker, contributor, and author for national and regional associations like AACRAO, PACRAO, ACBSP, and CAEL sharing insight on various topics including leadership, process improvement, PLA, international admissions, and articulation.

Marc holds Bachelor of Science and Master of Management degrees from the University of Phoenix, and is a candidate for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration.

PACRAO's Paperless Future

Stephen Shirreffs
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PACRAO took a step into the paperless future by using a mobile-friendly app called Guidebook as our primary communication device during the recent PACRAO 2017 Conference is beautiful Spokane, Washington. Guidebook entirely replaced the Schedule at a Glance as well as the paper forms for session evaluation.

PACRAO took a step into the paperless future by using a mobile-friendly app called Guidebook as our primary communication device during the recent PACRAO 2017 Conference is beautiful Spokane, Washington. Guidebook entirely replaced the Schedule at a Glance as well as the paper forms for session evaluation.

For those of you who did not attend the conference, but would like to have a look around, the app is still downloadable at https://guidebook.com/g/pacrao2017/.

This article is a reflection on our experience in creating our Guidebook, some data on how the Guidebook was used during the conference, and reflections on how we might get even more value from this app.

Overall, Guidebook was a great success. Anecdotally, I saw conferees using it all the time, and almost all the feedback I personally received was positive. The negative feedback occurred when something was broken, and we were able to fix the broken stuff very rapidly. An example is when we discovered that we had erroneously set the survey system so that a user could only fill out one session survey and was then blocked from any further feedback at other sessions. Once we identified the problem, a quick check-in with the online chat help from the Guidebook team was all we needed to find the box we needed to uncheck to fix the problem.

That points to the fact the one of the biggest positives was the exceptional support from the Guidebook team. The user interface for preparing the Guidebook was certainly intuitive, and once I'd done a number of work sessions, I was flying around inside the app like a swallow on spring morning ;-}

For an all-volunteer organization like PACRAO, it's important to provide member volunteers with responsive tools so that we can make a contribution without tearing our hair out. I think next year's program committee is going to appreciate this ease-of-use.

The app has many features, and we ended up choosing those features through discussion and experimentation. Some of the features we included were pretty obvious: the schedule, creating your own schedule, speakers and facilitators, and session surveys. We also enabled the attendees functionality, but this required that users check in. Some users did not check in, so they did not have the benefit of being able to message other attendees (see below).

We also created a list of all our vendor sponsors. It is always an important consideration for PACRAO to honor and recognize our sponsors because without them we simply would not be able to put on a conference or perform the many functions that make ours a viable organization. I think this is an area we should focus on next year. If I had it to do over, I would start earlier on this functionality so we could readily include links, a brief description, images and logos, and contact information. Perhaps we might find ways to use the app to increase vendor/particpant contact. I'm sure our vendors would appreciate it.

It took a little bit of time to master the maps functionality, but once I figured it out, I was able to map sessions to rooms. I'm not sure how useful that was, but when you're trying to figure something out quickly, it's nice to have a place to go! The maps functionality also facilitated creating an Eateries, Bars, and Attractions feature. That was a lot of fun to create and I hope that it was useful to participants. Spokane is actually a pretty fascinating smaller city, and its downtown is filled with excellent eating and drinking options. And if I succeeded in guiding a few people to the magnificent Monroe Street Bridge and its view of the spectacular Spokane Falls, then my work was a success!

But the devil is in the details. How about some stats?

The Guidebook was downloaded by a total of 267 users which is only slightly smaller than our total attendance. Of those, 104 users checked-in to the app so that they would be able to use all its functions; that's a number we should try to increase next year. (Anyone can use the app, but check-in users could use in-app functionality to connect with other attendees.)

There were a total of 18,232 unique sessions, and the maximum number of unique active users was 252 at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 7. Everybody was having breakfast and checking their app!

As you might expect, most of the downloads were physically done in people's home location, but 44 downloads were done in the Spokane area, and another 46 were done in the Seattle/Tacoma area. I suspect that a significant number of folks downloaded the app on their changeover in SeaTac!

Following is a chart of when downloads were done. There was a spike after President James Miller sent a reminder email, but the majority of downloads were at or immediately before the conference itself. This was our first year, so we were experimenting a lot. But next year, I think we should aim to have the app ready earlier, and try to get folks to download it earlier. This may help in building enthusiasm, increasing check-ins (see above), and facilitating communication among conference goers both before and during the conference.
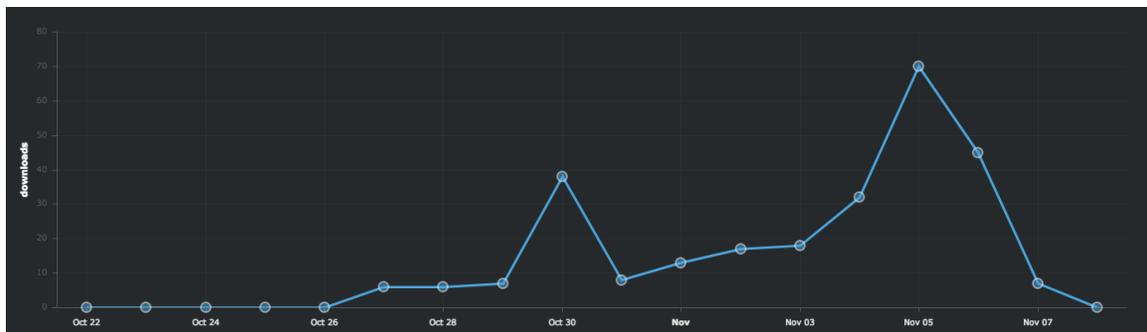
*Number of app downloads by date*

Users posted 104 photos that are still available on the app. That is a lot of fun, but we should aim to double that number next year! We had a Twitter function available, but I do not have stats on how many folks used the app for that purpose.

Digging down a little deeper, as you would expect the top menu item was the *schedule*.
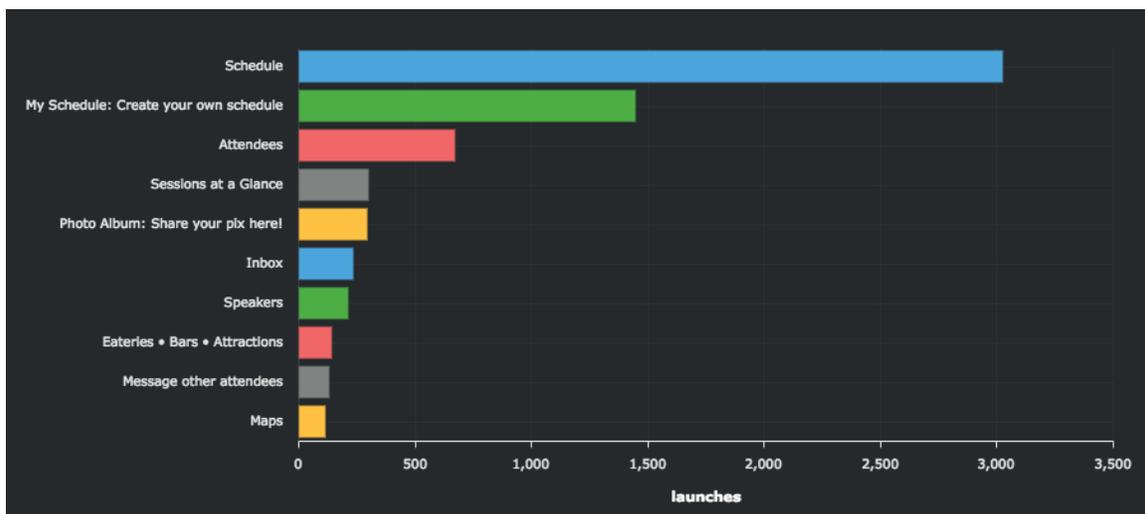
Again, I strongly suspect that some of the other functions would get better numbers if we had earlier adoption; conferees might want to check out the attractions or the vendors before they arrive if they have the app already in use. We had only ca 200 messages from one user to another, and of course people have lots of ways of communicating, but focusing on this might help make an even more friendly conference.

The top viewed custom list items is intriguing; the custom list includes any items that are not sessions.
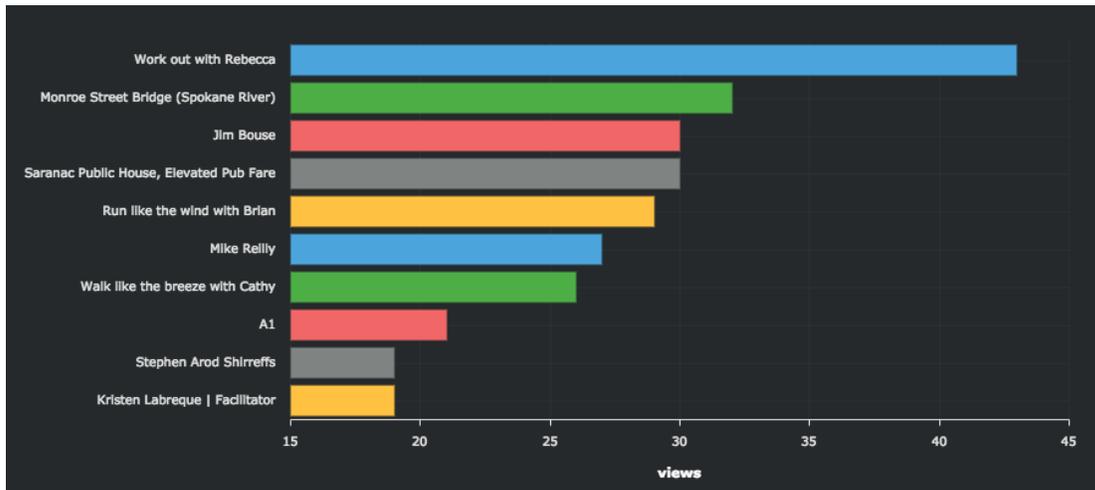
Workout with Rebecca tops the list! I'm glad to see the *Monroe Street Bridge* up there, and the *Saranac Public House* was definitely a highlight of one of my evenings. Not sure how Jim, Mike, Kristen, and I ended up in the list, but thanks folks for having a look/see! (Next year we might consider finding a way for speakers to add some personal details to their profiles, although that could end up being a lot of work.)

Perhaps the most important function of the Guidebook after scheduling, however, is session review, carried out this year for the first time entirely through the app. In 2016, we received 824 session reviews from combined online and paper sources. In 2017, using Guidebook alone, we received only 483 survey responses as of November 13, 2017; a few surveys trickled in after that. A total of 154 participants submitted at least one survey in 2017; we do not have numbers of participants for 2016 because of the method used to collect surveys. The results of 2017 represent a significant drop in participation in surveys. In 2018, it might be useful to figure out how to increase this number. Perhaps a reminder message could be sent based on session participation, or perhaps we could partially tie the swag table to participation: fill in a survey, get a prioritized chance to pick up some cool swag.

Some final recommendations that struck this writer: I think we should make more

use of messaging to everyone, especially before the conference, to direct people to features of the app and hopefully to engage attendees even before the conference begins. Given the success of the workout and recreation possibilities, we should look at ways to increase these as well; perhaps we could solve the old problem of finding new people to have lunch or dinner with through the app! Lastly, attendees asked whether the sessions selected during enrollment could be pre-loaded to Guidebook. We did not see an obvious way to do this, but we might work with Guidebook to solve this. Or, perhaps, we should just collect these selections in Guidebook upfront to promote the app.

There is a lot more data available that our Board may want to review, but I think this gives you a pretty good picture of the success of Guidebook in our first year.

Comments and thoughts are always welcome. Feel free to contact Colm Joyce, PACRAO VP for Professional Development at cjoyce@uws.edu if you have some perspectives or feedback.

Stephen is Associate University Registrar at Stanford, responsible for Registrar communications including web sites, the online course catalog, and the monthly Student Services Meeting of student services officers from across the University. Stephen has presented at PACRAO and AACRAO on topics ranging from Diffusion of Innovation to Credentialing, the Registrar, and the Future of Higher Education. He is an inaugural faculty member of PACRAO's Leadership Development Institute (LDI). He holds a doctorate (Berkeley, '98) in South and Southeast Asian Studies. In his free time, Stephen is an avid road cyclist who has recently completed his fifth AIDS/LifeCycle, an annual bicycle ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles dedicated to ending the AIDS epidemic and raising funds for HIV services..

See you all in Sacramento!