

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ABET ACCREDITATION

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ABSTRACT

Accreditation from a professional organization bestows an intangible credibility on a program, its faculty, curriculum and resources. Colleges and universities that can boast of accredited programs have a distinct edge in marketing themselves as quality institutions and can thereby attract talented faculty and students. Although the advantages of accreditation are numerous, some institutions are reluctant to pursue it because of the enormous workload involved, particularly in the area of assessment, and the uncertainties surrounding the outcome. This panel discussion will focus on the accreditation processes that ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) requires for CS (Computer Science) and IS (Information Systems) programs. Panelists from accredited institutions will discuss their experiences and offer suggestions to facilitate the process. A third panelist will present the accreditation process from the point of view of the evaluators and shed some light on how institutions can make the system work to their advantage. Sufficient time will be allocated at the end to take questions and to hear the accreditation experiences of other institutions.

Adel Abunawass:

I have been on both sides of the CAC/ABET accreditation process. Being part of the visiting team, being visited, or both is an educational experience. A visiting team is normally composed of three program evaluators. Program evaluators undergo extensive training by CAC/ABET, and do represent ABET when visiting a campus. The visiting team is a fact finding team; they review the self-study prior to the campus visit, and during the visit conduct a thorough and careful review of the program which includes discussions with faculty, staff, students, and administrators, as well as review additional documentation in support of the self-study. To ensure a smooth campus visit, I recommend: 1) that institutions create a complete self-study and review it for accuracy; 2) provide additional documentation as requested; 3) work with the chair of the visiting team to make arrangements for the on-campus visit; 4) keep in mind that there are many ways to meet the criteria; 5) and do not be shy, ask questions when things are not clear. Since the process is faculty driven, it is important that faculty are engaged in the various aspects of the process. Students are an integral part of the visit as their views are taken into account by the visiting team.

Dr. Adel Abunawass is a Professor and Chair of Computer Science at the University of West Georgia. He has been involved with CSAB and ABET accreditation at various institutions. He serves as a Program Evaluator for CAC/ABET.

Bernice Houle:

Pace University's CS program was one of the first (1986) CS programs accredited through CSAB (now ABET) and the IS program was the first (2002) in the country to be accredited through ABET. The changes in the accreditation standards over the years have been minor except for the relatively recent focus on assessment. I will focus on the need to have very clear program objectives and learning outcomes and present various assessment tools that have been incorporated into a comprehensive assessment plan for the School of Computer Science and Information Systems to assess the stated outcomes. The need for the assessment process to have a full cycle, that is, that the assessment is reviewed and changes are made as a result, will also be explained.

Dr. Bernice J. Houle is an Associate Dean in the School of Computer Science and Information Systems at Pace University. She has worked on a number of assessment and accreditation initiatives for the School including the re-accreditation of the Computer Science program (2001), the initial accreditation of the Information Systems program (2002), and the successful application for the School to be named a Center of Academic Excellence by the National Security Agency.

Deborah Whitfield:

In the 2004 - 2005 accreditation cycle, Slippery Rock University applied for ABET accreditation of both the Computer Science and Information Systems degree programs. As the institution's liaison, I was responsible for preparing the questionnaire, organizing the visit, and preparing the responses after the visit. The orchestration of the visit and the preparation of the questionnaire was complicated by the review of two programs: CS and IS. The proposed changes to the ABET criteria (effective for the 2007-2008 accreditation cycle) should help to alleviate some of the demands placed on institutions in the review of multiple programs. The proposed changes consist of the eight criteria and their description for CS, IS, and IT. The general criteria are followed by distinctions for any or all of the eight criteria with respect to the particular program. I will outline the process that we undertook in preparation for the team's visit of both programs and provide tips for a constructive ABET visit. In addition, I will introduce the proposed ABET criteria for 2007-2008.

Dr. Deborah Whitfield is a Professor in the Computer Science Department at Slippery Rock University. As Assistant Chair, she is SRU's liaison to ABET as they apply for accreditation for both Computer Science and Information Systems.