

Episode 2 - The history and context of accreditation and WIU

Bookend

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- Welcome to the second podcast episode of *The Leatherneck Accreditation Lab*. Today's episode titled History and Context seeks to provide the listeners with a brief history of accreditation in the US and some facts about Western's accreditation over the last century.

The history of higher education in the United States dates back to the mid-1600s when Harvard University was first established. Higher education grew fairly quickly in the North American colonies and by the time the Declaration of Independence was signed, 18 colleges and universities still in existence today had been founded.

When the government of the United States of America was established in the late 1700s, it lacked a department or ministry of education. In fact, today's US Department of Education is a fairly new department within the government. But with that being said it meant and still means that the US, unlike other countries, has no central authority that exercises control over the quality of higher education. As a result of this context, the practice of accreditation arose as a way to conduct non-governmental peer evaluations of quality.

There are two main types of accreditation that we, at Western Illinois University, need to be concerned with. The first is programmatic accreditation, through which individual programs are accredited by specialized agencies. More than a dozen programs at WIU are accredited individually.

The second is regional accreditation of the institution. Western Illinois University is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and has been since 1913. Every 10 years, Western must seek reaffirmation of accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission. And while some see the accreditation process as tedious or a process of jumping through hoops, it is vitally important to the institution. A strong record of accreditation and a good relationship with the regional accrediting body has helped Western through the years to transform and grow.

The process of creating an assurance argument - something that used to be called a self-study - has allowed the university to realize its strengths and capitalize on them. It allowed WIU to begin awarding bachelor's degrees in 1918 and to become Western Illinois State Teachers College in 1921, to confer its first master's degrees in 1946 and to eventually become Western Illinois University in 1957.

This process we are going through right now is just another stepping stone towards future improvement and transformation.

Please take some time prior to March 29. Visit the webpage with the accreditation information and read the drafts of the arguments that the university will be submitting to HLC. The information contained in them is both informative and impressive. The webpages can be found at wiu.edu/aasp

Thank you for listening.

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