Higher education has firmly transitioned into an era of accountability. In the process, regional accreditation has come under scrutiny: policy makers see accreditors as policy enforcers; institutions resent burdensome, prescriptive procedures; and external stakeholders denounce accreditors as protectionist gatekeepers limiting innovative competition, or, worse, as simply ineffective.

In her 2015 book *Five Dimensions of Quality: A Common Sense Guide to Accreditation and Accountability*, Linda Suskie draws on her 40-year career as an accreditation consultant and vice president of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to provide a lens for understanding accreditation requirements, identifying strategies to meet those requirements, and establishing sustainable quality assurance practices.

Accreditation carries the stigma of being an onerous, self-serving process that while encouraging institutional reflexivity seldom generates measurable quality improvement. That said, Suskie is on point when she asserts, “accreditation can have a high impact, forcing necessary improvements” (p. 22). As the party responsible for leading an institutional accreditation effort, I found Suskie’s frequently asked questions and contextualization of the issues surrounding the self-study process immediately transferrable in clarifying ambiguous requirements and redirecting the conversations of our working committees.

The author opens with a comprehensive discussion of accreditation’s changing role in our higher education institutions, from its origins as a means of legitimation through collegial peer review to its current function as an accountability tool establishing benchmarks for performance management and resource allocation. The core of the book presents five campus cultures that embody quality: relevance, community, focus and aspiration, evidence, and betterment. Suskie employs the example of a road trip as an accessible analogy carried throughout the book to illustrate the quality assurance process: Where is the institution in its evolution? What are the available resources? Where is the campus headed? How will it get there?

In keeping with the broad scope of the book as a general guide to accreditation, the author provides a descriptive overview of terminology and presents strategies for interpreting standard requirements accompanied by contextualized examples taken from her work with a range of higher education institutions. These examples are curated to reflect common campus issues, from dealing with communication silos to documenting evidence to establishing measurable outcomes. Readers looking for ways to construct evidence-based assessment rubrics for formal analyses of organizational structures and academic programs for compliance purposes will not be disappointed. These examples are tempered, however, by Suskie’s call to foster an institutional culture that moves
beyond compliance to sustainable practices designed to support ongoing program improvement.

The narrative examples offer insightful strategies for those in a range of positions, and though Suskie hopes to reach a broad audience that includes senior administrators, board members, and faculty, individuals working directly with accreditation efforts are likely to treat this work as a vade mecum. For those responsible for leading accreditation working committees, a complex and often-fraught process, this book should be required reading.

In closing, the author asks whether it is possible for institutions to embrace the task of self-evaluation in the spirit of improvement and accountability through existing accreditation models, weighing several alternative methods of quality assurance. Regardless of the mechanism, Suskie concludes with a broad appeal to advance a culture of quality by explaining that “the kind of transformation that U.S. higher education needs—one that embraces all five cultures of quality—can happen only with the active involvement of higher education leaders, including college presidents, higher education associations, and accreditors” (p. 241).

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