

Accredititis: More Than 10 Years of Overzealous Hiring Practices for Business Faculty Based on AACSB Accreditation

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Business schools in the United States have experienced improvements related to processes of institutional accreditation. Accreditation standards set forth by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) have influenced the recruitment and hiring practices of faculty members. We bring attention to and reflect on such practices to examine potential distortions in qualification standards for hiring new business faculty. In the current study, we analyzed recent job advertisements for business faculty identifying properties related to degree qualifications and other criteria. We found trends indicating many business schools specify preferences or requirements that candidates possess degrees from AACSB accredited schools.

Keywords: AACSB, faculty credentials, hiring, job ads, isomorphism

INTRODUCTION

Business schools in the United States, and higher education institutions (HEI) have transformed and evolved as important elements of American society (Khurana, 2007). In the last century, these institutions have faced the adoption of an accreditation process that has helped improve the quality of their programs. The widespread adoption of accreditation standards has significantly grown in the last 30 to 40 years. More institutions are looking to enhance and legitimize the quality of their programs, which has had favorable effects in student recruitment and educational outcomes. Within the United States, there are several business program accreditation agencies. However, accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, or AACSB, is considered the gold standard for business schools (Espiritu, 2007; Everard, Edmonds, & Pierre, 2013; Trifts, 2012).

Although most literature reports major benefits for the accredited institutions, few articles have addressed the downsides of the AACSB accreditation process and obstacles that institutions face to achieve this recognition. Romero (2008) indicated some faculty and administrators' concerns in relation to such accreditation. In the essay, Romero mentioned, among many other issues, faculty and administrators

develop a false perception during the hiring process that universities must only hire faculty from AACSB accredited schools. Although the validity of such statements was not supported, this perception commonly influenced hiring practices.

To validate Romero's work, the following research question was proposed: Do the United States Higher Education Institutions' (Business Schools) faculty hiring requirements (applicants' degree characteristics) align with standards provided by the accreditors' agency - Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)? If so, are these practices in accordance with promoting diversity and inclusion, and globalization narrative taught by business schools in the United States?

The aim of this paper is to open a reflective conversation concerning the adopted faculty hiring practices for business schools and Higher Education Institutions in the United States, primarily those accredited by AACSB. This call to reflection is grounded on what is thought to be an overzealousness in faculty recruitment requirements. These requirements have been previously considered elements of discriminatory practices by Business Schools in the US (McFarlane, 2010).

During the time this article was finished and submitted to a journal, the AACSB released its new 2020 accreditation standards. It is imperative to indicate that our claims are grounded on the 2013 standards. Nevertheless, after reviewing the new 2020 new standards, we believe our arguments still remain and the issues we analyzed in this manuscript continue to persist.

In this manuscript, we present empirical facts and arguments that support this idea. The exaggeration of the adherence to accreditation standards can have unintended negative outcomes for both the accrediting body and the accredited institutions. The paper is structured in the following format: (i) first, we present a theoretical framework that supports the idea that organizations follow or copy these patterns to gain legitimacy; (ii) second, we review the recruitment processes in United States business schools and higher education institutions, with a specific focus on the job advertisements used in such processes; (iii) third, we develop a coding methodology to empirically test our arguments using recent data; (iv) fourth, we discuss our findings and provide a contrast with those from previous research and positions.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

As indicated by Wan & Peterson (2007), many changes in higher education institutions obey internal and external motives or "forces". These adjustments relate to assumptions indicated in the Institutional Theory in the realms of management and organizations. Through this theory, DiMaggio & Powell (1983) along with Meyer & Rowan (1977) argue that organizations must adapt to norms, rules and environmental pressures to stay in business and survive. The previous theoretical framework labels these changes as isomorphisms or templates. The isomorphisms are forms that the organizations must adopt to survive. Building upon stories which support these modifications (Fernandes, 2019), organizations legitimize their actions in pursuing adaptation to the environment and internalities, and many argue that acquisition of legitimacy is necessary for such organizations to survive (Colyvas & Powell, 2006).

There are three types of templates or isomorphisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The first type of isomorphism, coercive, involves organizational changes that must be adopted in order to adhere to mandates from supra organizations, society or culture. In many cases, these are considered a form of rules. The second type is normative isomorphism, through which organizations change in an effort to legitimize their similarity to other entities. These normative templates are largely driven by industrial or professional pressures. Lastly, mimetic isomorphism represents an imitation process in which organizations adopt changes with the logic that if others are doing it, then it will also work for the adopter. These three types of isomorphism explain the reasoning behind many organizational changes.

The use of isomorphs and institutional theory is not a novel approach. In fact, using the same context, authors have extended such theory in relation to automorphism. Czarniawska & Genell (2002) argue that this type of isomorphism happens when the organization tries to replicate what they considered a previous success. The authors state such an approach was assumed by a Swedish organization when it adopted changes which helped it in the past.

As previously indicated, Institutional Theory and isomorphism are not new when trying to understand changes in HEI. For instance, Croucher and Woelert (2016) explain changes to the Australian Higher Education during the 1980's and conclude mimetic isomorphisms were clearly present, but also raise concerns in relation to some potential coercive templates during this period. Trotter and Mitchell (2019) argue how some institutions of higher education in Canada follow some coercive isomorphism regarding regulation from their provincial governments, and in some instances changes follow expectations from Canadian society. On the other hand, Dattey, Westerheijden and Hofman (2014) argue that, within the context of Ghana, coercive isomorphisms related to accreditation processes are stronger on private HEI compared to public institutions. These examples support the idea that organizational changes in HEI are grounded within explanations from institutional theory, and often much more in relation specifically to isomorphism.

Nonetheless, Czarniawska & Genell (2002) briefly mentioned that in some cases there could be some sense of exaggeration when organizations assume changes or isomorphisms. In the same line, Levy (2004) clearly indicated that there are some instances in which there are exaggerations of non-coercive isomorphisms. He argued that in certain situations, organizations attempt to obtain legitimacy using other sources of references. Furthermore, the author claimed organizations exaggerate isomorphisms when the goals related to such changes provide legitimacy when contrasted with others. In any case, exaggeration of adopting normative and mimetic isomorphism is evident, and although adoption could yield potential benefits for institutions, such practices may be shortsighted and result in unintended negative consequences. This is the core assertion in our paper, as we argue that in many cases HEI, and particularly business schools in the US, are exaggerating some of the isomorphism when attempting to achieve accreditations like AACSB.

Considering what was highlighted above, accreditation in higher education includes processes that lead to institutional isomorphism. In the case of United States, HEI's multiple tiered accreditation system, along with other accreditation bodies, are not necessarily governed by a countrywide institution.

The US Department of Education recognizes a group of accreditation organizations, some being regional organizations (schools, colleges, and universities), for example, the Higher Learning Commission, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and Middle States Commission on Higher Education, among others. Some are more focused on national educational modalities or a niche type of education, for example, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission and the Council on Occupational Education. A third group are more likely to include accredited programs, like the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, and the American Bar Association as some examples. Finally, other groups that may not be under any of the mentioned organizations, still accredit their institution of higher education or programs. This is the case of the AACSB. Usually, Higher Education Institutions in the have US have one regional accreditation, and in some instances one programmatic accreditation per program.

The AACSB accreditation signifies that a school has met the "accepted standards" for business education (Durand & McGuire, 2005). As is indicated on the institutional website, the organization was founded in 1916 by prestigious universities in the United States with the intention to define the quality standards in relation to business education and programs. The accreditation is a standards-based process, in which the institutions accredited must provide evidence of achieving and maintaining those standards. Currently, in early 2020, there are fifteen standards set forth by AACSB, and recently AACSB announced the number of standards may be reduced to nine by 2020 (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), n.d.). These standards include minimum conditions expected from accredited institutions in regard to four pillars: (1) *Strategic Management and Innovation*; (2) *Participants - Students, Faculty, and Professional Staff*; (3) *Learning and Teaching*; and (4) *Academic and Professional Engagement*. Nonetheless, candidate schools have to opt in to the new standards or keep the old.

Although there is not a strict timeline for the accreditation process, anecdotally many institutions achieve AACSB accreditation between four to five years after their initial application. The accreditation process implies continuous improvement by participating institutions, and adoption of the organizational changes during accreditation process can be viewed as isomorphisms. Clearly, these changes are generally

normative (Casile & Davis-Blake, 2002; Cooper, Parkes, & Blewitt, 2014). Nevertheless, our argument is that there are some mimetic isomorphisms that we believe are exaggerated.

Another theoretical lens useful for understanding why business schools are motivated to adopt highly similar (or mimetic) practices like only recruiting applicants from AACSB-accredited institutions is social signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011). This theory asserts that organizations are motivated to signal information to stakeholders about institutional attributes they view as important to garnering legitimacy. Such signal attributes include quality, reputation, and prestige, which can serve as strategic resources for the organization to leverage its competitive advantages (Deephouse, 2000). In terms of faculty recruitment, when business schools signal these elements, especially through academic rigor of a candidate's degree, we argue they are attempting to bolster perceptions of the signal in potential candidates. However, also importantly we believe schools are adopting these practices in a widespread manner because they also need to compete with other institutions for talent in the labor market. Moreover, research has found that lower performing organizations, like those who suffer from the liability of market newness, are more prone to engage in social signaling efforts to enhance their legitimacy because they feel pressure to boost their long-term prospective performance (Certo, 2003).

At an institutional level, we also view the issue of business faculty recruitment through the perspective of the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, 1987). The ASA model is a sociological theory of human capital emergence in organizations that proposes human resource practices of attracting talent, selecting applicants, and retaining employees lead to homogeneity within the organization. In other words, over time the organization becomes comprised of more like members that share similar attributes, because those who do not fit with the organization will leave. This homogenous dimension relates to human capital of the institution, including tacit knowledge, specialized skills, abilities, and other types of organizational competencies retained at the employee level. In theory, hiring practices that promote homogeneity by hiring candidates with the same academic backgrounds undercuts the benefits of including a diversity of perspectives within an organization's human capital. For example, if all business schools adopted the same hiring practices, such as only recruiting candidates from AACSB-accredited schools, we would argue based on the ASA model that this has the potential to create silos of myopic viewpoints that stifle innovation on campus, as well as harm long-term viability and performance of the organization.

In the following sections, we now focus our attention on the recruiting practices through job advertisements and postings implemented by various business schools in the United States.

JOB POSTING AS RECRUITMENT PRACTICE IN THE UNITED STATES' BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Finch et al. (2016) raise the issue that there is limited research in relation to faculty qualifications and recruiting, which is quite interesting considering an academic talent shortage ongoing since 2002 has been claimed (Mobley & Easley, n.d.; Swartz, Swartz, & Liang, 2007; Verhaegen, 2005). Furthermore, other persistent issues like lack of diversity among faculty and administrative personnel in business schools have been observed (Levsen, Goettel, Chong, & Farris, 2001; Moshiri & Cardon, 2016). These two concerns, along with an ethnocentric perception of North American faculty, calls for a more complete understanding of how faculty recruitment is implemented in the United States.

Considering that these problems have been voiced for quite some time, we would expect business schools to address them through improvements to their recruitment and hiring practices. However, unfortunately this is not the reality, and rather perhaps more of a situation where people expect different outcomes from doing the same things.

Common stages of a traditional faculty search process include the following steps: place job advertisement; accept applications; receive nominations from colleagues at other universities; review and rank candidates; interview candidates; and finally, make a job offer (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010). As indicated before, for the purposes of this research we focus attention on the first initial step of the process, the job advertisement. The literature in recruitment processes (Breaugh, 2008) indicates the job ad or post

comprises both recruitment objectives (candidates characteristics: education, knowledge, skills, abilities, work experience, interest, diversity) and strategy development (whom and where to recruit).

Candidates' characteristics such as knowledge, skills and attributes (KSAs) are still considered key elements in the recruitment process (Shafique, 2012). These important fundamentals can be conceptualized as inherent characteristics to succeed in a job or position. Reaching a consensus on such KSAs before beginning a recruitment search process, and identifying those elements early on among applicants, can facilitate decision-making and expedite the hiring process. However, if these KSAs are not necessarily aligned with expectations of what is needed for candidates to be successful in their eventual positions, problems in the recruitment process and outcomes may arise downstream.

Finch et al. (2016) indicate, citing (Adler & Harzing, 2009), that hiring processes in academia, among other things, are grounded largely in tradition. Thus, if the job ads are designed in the tradition of academia, it is probable that some higher education institutions simply just replicate what other institutions do. This argument is supported by the tenets of the institutional theory mentioned before, in which some institutions assume mimetic isomorphisms following others, and as automorphisms (replicating ads that have been successful in the past). Our concern with this approach is that some organizations may follow mimetic isomorphism to blindly copy other organizations. Although these higher education institutions operate at the same level, they may require different (not similar) approaches to hiring faculty.

A specific context in which we can recognize this dynamic is among AACSB accredited business schools. Accredited schools include a wide range of institutions with the same accreditation but with different resources, market conditions, and organizational missions. We argue, in the case of faculty recruitment, some schools follow the same recruitment practices in relation to job ad or posting patterns used by other schools with different characteristics (e.g. level of research expected).

A long-lasting practice among accredited institution relates to the faculty hiring credentials expected from prospective candidates. There is a dual criterion to follow in relation to faculty credential in higher education and business schools. First, credential characteristics are defined in the regional accreditation agency to which the HEI belongs (e.g. Higher Learning Commission, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges).

For example, the Higher Learning Commission publishes a guide in which they clearly define the academic qualification for faculty depending on the level of course work they will deliver (HLC, 2016). Faculty characteristics provided by the HLC include the following: faculty should have a degree in the subdomain in which they teach; undergraduate faculty should have a degree one level of the undergraduate with 18 credit hours in the domain; if teaching graduate course faculty should have a terminal degree on the domain along with "scholarship and achievements" in the field, for faculty teaching doctoral course they should have "record of scholarship and preparation" and the scholarship should be in the field related to the course.

The second credential characteristic within the scope of our research pertains to the requirements established by the AACSB accreditation body. As July 2020, the AACSB had 15 standards outlining the expectations for business schools and programs. Our attention focused on reviewing standard 15, which defines the criteria for faculty qualification. However, this previous standard related to our research focus also connects with standard 6, which explicitly requires the schools to "*Describe processes and practices that advance diversity and inclusion among faculty.*" Faculty members of AACSB accredited institutions are categorized into four groups: Scholarly Academics (SA); Practitioners Academics (PA); Scholarly Practitioners (SP); and Instructional Practitioners (IP). For the first two categories (SA and PA), the standard elaborates on the importance of faculty having doctoral degrees in the domain in which they teach. The two last groups (SP and IP) are expected to have a master's-level graduate degree in the areas in which they teach. In addition, this qualification standard states that Scholarly Academic faculty members must demonstrate certain scholarly activities and adhere to specific research expectations. Standard 15 also indicates that an institution must have at least 40% of the faculty categorized as SA to maintain AACSB accreditation.

Ultimately, guidelines set forth by HLC, along with the standards of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 2016), including a critical review of the latter accreditation body (Miles, Franklin, Heriot, Hadley, & Hazeldine, 2014), do not articulate the origins (i.e., degree-granting institution) of either doctoral or master's degrees for faculty. In contrast, documents from both HLC and AACSB contain strong references to faculty members' research and/or scholarly contributions. We can assume that this is a critical element and therefore we expect that job ads from business programs give high attention to the degree (i.e., doctoral or master's) depending on the level of courses to be taught. For instance, research expectations for faculty at AACSB accredited schools include obtaining a minimum of two peer-reviewed publications within the span of five years (Hinnenkamp, Correia, & Wilkinson, 2019).

This contradicting guidance in relation to the degree origins of faculty members appears to have been an issue for quite some time. More specifically, a false perception exists among faculty and administrators at AACSB Schools that all faculty to be hired should have terminal degrees from AACSB institutions (Romero, 2008, p. 251). However, this is not true. Although it is clear that the prestige of the institution from which the candidate was conferred a degree is a predictor of the candidate's job placement (Clauzet, Arbesman, & Larremore, 2015), this may vary significantly when reviewing institutions below the upper echelon. McLaren (2019) argues that in general US business schools have adopted a research-based model, and consequently there is a large push to recruit faculty with the potential and capability to support such a model. This logic reinforces the perception that only faculty who come from such accredited institutions will be able to generate the research expected of them.

Nevertheless, McLaren's position may deviate from the AACSB. The accreditation body clearly recognizes there must be an alignment between the accredited institutions' mission statements and their use of resources, including faculty. Other institutions, such as comprehensive state institutions, include many institutions that are considered primarily teaching institutions (Henderson, 2007)

When we connect these previous positions on faculty degree characteristics with issues like faculty shortage among business schools, calls by the AACSB to increase diversity, inclusion, and global mindset appear to be contradictory. In other words, one side of academia is in high need of talent, while the other side has not considered eligible applicants who graduate from non AACSB accredited schools. Depending on the research inclination of institutions, recruitment credentials of new faculty should vary from school to school. In other words, job advertisements should contain a range of narratives related to differences in research expectations.

Our central hypothesis is currently many US business schools require doctoral degrees from AACSB accredited organizations, and among these institutions, many appear to be following this approach to recruiting and hiring faculty as a form of mimetic isomorphism.

METHODS

In response to our research questions, and after having established in the previous section that AACSB does not mandate their standards or any differences in relation to the origin of an applicant's terminal degree, we focus our attention on reviewing business faculty job ads.

Following previous research in recruiting business faculty (Finch et al., 2016), we only considered job posts for Tenure-Track positions. These positions usually contain job characteristics which make them more important in relation to KSAs. We gathered our data from two recognizable job sites used by United States Higher Education Institutions and some foreign institutions to advertise their job ads, HigherEdJobs (<https://www.higheredjobs.com/>) and ChronicleVitae (<https://chroniclevitae.com/>), during the period of July to August 2019. Both websites advertise positions from highly intensive research and Ivy League institutions, and also from community college institutions. On the first site, we narrowed our search by category (Faculty) and considered positions under the 'Business' category. For the second website, we browsed positions by type and considered those under Faculty & Research (Business and Management). Job postings present on both sites were considered as only one unique posting, as long as text was similar or equal with regard to denoting degree characteristics (e.g., ads did not vary across websites). Our search

yielded 108 unique job posts from 101 institutions (85 AACSB accredited and 16 non-accredited by this body), with 100 in the US and one with shared programs between US and China.

Coding

In line with our arguments related to mimetic isomorphism and the exaggeration of these requirements, we deemed it important to differentiate between types of institutions in terms of level of degree offered. We then coded job posts on the basis if these posts included expectations that applicants possess a terminal degree from an AACSB accredited institution. If a degree from an AACSB was required, we also coded whether it was preferred or no indication provided, and this characteristic was used to determine what we labelled as institutional *rigorousness*.

Following McCormick & Zhao (2005), we classified schools into three categories using the academic degree offered with higher level in the business discipline as a differentiating factor (i.e., 3- PhD or DBA, 2-Master's or MBA, and 1-Bachelor's). Although this approach differs from common approaches like those using the Carnegie Classification, our research will be more meaningful to consider this specificity in the level of business degrees awarded by schools.

To code the *rigorousness* of how HEI require applicants with degrees from AACSB schools, we list the keywords associated to the job ad requirements narrative (e.g., “degree from AACSB school or programs... expected, minimum, must, only, preferred, required and should”). These keywords were reviewed by three coders until reaching level of agreement between them and were categorized as (2 = “Required”, 1 = “Prefer”). A third category (0 = “None”) captures those institutions that do not denote an AACSB degrees as either a requirement or a preference.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We conducted a crosstab analysis based on the level of degree offered in business program per institution, and the strictness level indicated on the job ads for terminal degrees (see Table 1). This descriptive approach allows us to visualize and compare percentages between each group of institutions and the requirement analyzed.

TABLE 1
HIGHEST BUSINESS DEGREE OFFERED * RIGOROUSNESS IN DOCTORAL DEGREE FROM AACSB CROSSTABULATION

		Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB			Total	
		None	Prefer	Required		
Highest Business Degree Offered	Bachelor	Count	1	2	5	8
		% within Highest Business Degree Offered	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	100.0%
		% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	16.7%	9.1%	6.3%	7.4%
		% of Total	0.9%	1.9%	4.6%	7.4%
Master		Count	5	16	61	82
		% within Highest Business Degree Offered	6.1%	19.5%	74.4%	100.0%
		% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	83.3%	72.7%	76.3%	75.9%
		% of Total	4.6%	14.8%	56.5%	75.9%

PhD	Count	0	4	14	18
	% within Highest Business Degree Offered	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
	% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	0.0%	18.2%	17.5%	16.7%
	% of Total	0.0%	3.7%	13.0%	16.7%
Total	Count	6	22	80	108
	% within Highest Business Degree Offered	5.6%	20.4%	74.1%	100.0%
	% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	5.6%	20.4%	74.1%	100.0%

As observed in Table 1 (108 jobs advertisements), the percentage of rigorous institutions requiring a degree from an AACSB institution from their applicants is similar among those institutions which grant doctoral and master's degrees in business disciplines. The percentages are 77.8% required and 22.2% prefer for doctoral granting institutions, while 74.4% required and 19.5% prefer for master's granting institutions. In relation to those institutions that only confer bachelor's degrees, more flexibility in the degree's origin requirement is denoted, but an AACSB terminal degree is required in 62.5% of the cases among that group.

The results presented above clearly establish an empirical basis for our research question, as our analyses demonstrate almost 95% of the job ads require or prefer candidates with terminal degrees from an AACSB institution. Therefore, we can support the idea these institutions follow mimetic isomorphism; in other words, many HEI use the requirement just to follow what other institutions do. This appears to be especially true for those whose highest degree granted is a master's degree.

TABLE 2
HIGHEST BUSINESS DEGREE OFFERED * RIGOROUSNESS IN DOCTORAL DEGREE
FROM AACSB CROSSTABULATION- NON AACSB ACCREDITED SCHOOLS

		Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB			Total	
		None	Prefer	Required		
Highest Business Degree Offered	Bachelor	Count	1	1	3	5
		% within Highest Business Degree Offered	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	33.3%	25.0%	33.3%	31.3%
		% of Total	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	31.3%
Master		Count	2	3	6	11
		% within Highest Business Degree Offered	18.2%	27.3%	54.5%	100.0%
		% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	66.7%	75.0%	66.7%	68.8%
		% of Total	12.5%	18.8%	37.5%	68.8%
Total		Count	3	4	9	16

% within Highest Business Degree Offered	18.8%	25.0%	56.3%	100.0%
% within Rigorousness in Doctoral degree from AACSB	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total	18.8%	25.0%	56.3%	100.0%

As shown in Table 2, which illustrates the 16 job advertisements from non AACSB accredited institutions, we apply the same crosstab descriptive analysis in order to discriminate between AACSB accredited and non-accredited schools. Here, the results are more pronounced, as these analyses indicate more than 80% of non AACSB accredited institutions require or prefer applicants with degrees from AACSB accredited institutions. Such findings demonstrate the strong ambiguity of such recruiting practices, and support the idea that in many cases, the exaggeration of those mimetic isomorphisms is true and real.

These initial results, using novel data analyses and techniques to illustrate some of the mimetic institutional practices, raise important concerns about faculty recruitment practices among business schools in the US which we expand upon in our discussion.

DISCUSSION

There are multiple undeniable benefits that US Higher Education Institutions and business schools have obtained through accreditation bodies like AACSB. Such practices like developing a strategic plan, improving documentation of learning assurance, seeking continuous quality improvements, and emphasis on faculty quantity and quality (Trifts, 2012) are tangible and valuable operational advantages. Others benefits include improvement in schools' brand recognition (Bitter, 2014), and enhancement in schools' collective research output (Elliott, 2013). Although there exists a wealth of opportunities for positive gains to be realized through accreditation, there is also a potential for negative consequences to arise for these institutions.

The results that emerge from this paper clearly narrow attention on the issues previously highlighted by Romero (2008), in which he indicates stakeholders' concerns particularly to faculty qualifications. To be more precise, as we previously articulated there is a perception among faculty members and administrators that new faculty hired should have terminal degrees from AACSB accredited institutions, which clearly as we explained in previous sections of this paper, is false. First, we offer initial empirical evidence to support the idea that a large portion of institutions (accredited or not), include this as a recruitment requirement as a mimetic isomorphism, but in some cases is exaggerated in an effort to demonstrate and consolidate legitimacy.

More than 10 years have passed since Romero's research and it is evident that the situation has not changed. Most literature and periodicals that we reviewed argue that administrators and other faculty keep using this approach due to the heavy emphasis AACSB accreditation gives to research. There is a belief that candidates from non-AACSB accredited institutions will not be able to maintain the scholarly expectations. From our perspective, this belief is grossly misled and is not supported with evidence, or even credible anecdotes. Such an approach to hiring faculty members devalues the tremendous intellectual contributions made by business scholars who graduated from schools that were not or are not currently accredited.

There are a few key concerns that have arisen since when we started this research that have been creating a lot of noise. Two particularly relate to how this form of bias towards individuals with terminal degrees from non-AACSB accredited institutions. Anecdotally, on the web, the number of existing universities with business schools in the world is around 20,000. The US Secretary of Education tallies around 4,000 universities and colleges with business schools in the US. On the other hand, based on the

AACSB portal, there are 856 accredited institutions in the US and the world. This disproportionate amount of accredited and non-accredited business schools raises questions.

In the case of the United States, there are many HEIs accredited for regional agencies that confer terminal degrees in business. Contrasting statistics extracted from the site College Navigator (<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>) collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, for degrees granted 2017-2018, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (an AACSB accredited institution) granted 22 terminal degrees in business areas while Walden University (non AACSB accredited), also in Minnesota, conferred 431 terminal degrees in business areas. Similarly, Arizona State University (an AACSB accredited institution) granted 32 terminal degrees in business areas while University of Phoenix (non AACSB accredited) conferred 130 terminal degrees in business fields. To add to such disparity, when contrasting the racial enrollment differences in enrollment, both non-AACSB accredited institutions mentioned before, surpass the accredited in relation to serving more minority students, particularly those from African American and Hispanic populations. This may contradict findings by Smith et al. (2004), which indicate characteristics like ethnicity and doctoral granting institution are not related to qualifications. Perhaps the increase of nontraditional schools (many non-AACSB accredited) since their study plays an important role in this contradiction.

The previous examples may expose some Higher Education Institution and Business schools operating in the US to what is known as a probable disparate impact. This is described as “when policies, practices, rules or other systems that appear to be neutral result in a disproportionate impact on a protected group” (“What are disparate impact and disparate treatment?,” n.d.).

The recruiting practices identified in our research, through which AACSB schools require or prefer candidates from AACSB schools, appear to diverge from AACSB’s espoused value of “diversity”, which is revisited and mentioned multiple times in the accrediting body’s list of standards. We may argue that as Dooley (2003, p. 266) mentioned there is no “University and Personal Commitment” to change this narrative, and without such commitments, the possibility to reach diverse applicants is not feasible. The second concern is how, in the same fashion that graduates from non-accredited institutions in the United States may be negatively impacted by such practices, graduates from overseas with terminal degrees from non-accredited institutions may similarly be negatively impacted by such practices. We previously reported that accredited AACSB business schools comprise a tiny proportion of the universities around the world (cumulatively less than 5%). As such, many potential candidates with terminal degrees from foreign non-AACSB accredited institution are not included in business faculty searches here in the US, which represents a crafty form of procedural unfairness. Again, if multiple elements of the AACSB standards encourage globalization and “diversity” (see standard 6, “processes and practices that advance diversity and inclusion among faculty”) within business education, this recruiting practice seemingly directly contradicts these elements.

The final concern arising from our research is the strong ethnocentric perception such faculty recruiting practices generate in the eyes of the international business academic community. Administrators and faculty who support the idea to only hire faculty members from AACSB institutions choose to ignore or overlook other foreign external agencies that accredit business programs (e.g., EQUIS and AMBA). Although in a few cases these other agencies are mentioned in the job ads analyzed for the current research, the proportion is miniscule compared to AACSB. Also, we should consider other countries have governmental quality accreditation agencies for higher education (a list can be located on the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) website <https://www.inqaahe.org/>). Although we are not arguing standards for each country are equal, some countries historically have produced excellent higher education outcomes. We should also consider that for many countries in which education is public (at no cost for the students), having a governmental quality accreditation agency should be sufficient for those countries, and such countries may not be willing to waste financial resources to support a foreign agency accreditation process.

We view our research as having two major contributions. First, our research contributes to literature on Institutional Theory. In our perspective we have been able to identify a clear example of exaggerated mimetic isomorphism. The trends identified in our analyses, in which some Institute of Higher Education

prefer or require candidates with terminal degrees from AACSB schools, are clearly real-world examples of such theoretical concepts. Second, our findings also have implications for hiring practices pertaining to business school faculty. Our analysis raises important issues for administrators, faculty, and deans in charge of managing faculty recruitment. While the approach of preferring or requiring candidates with degrees from AACSB accredited institutions may, in their views, maintain or support signals for scholarly aptitude, there could many potentially viable applicants (local and foreigners) that appear to have been excluded from the process entirely. Of course, potential applicants will not apply if they feel this requirement is rigorously enforced. Rethinking this may change some of the issues related to shortage in faculty. If the argument is candidates' origin of terminal degree relates to scholarship production, then technology will allow a review of candidates in the early recruitment stages.

Another implication is we sound a call to action for non-AACSB accredited schools, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and perhaps the Secretary of Education. Specifically, non-AACSB accredited schools should find ways to improve the perception of their graduates with terminal degrees. CHEA and the Secretary of Education should review this situation, as we believe it is an odd and potentially unfair condition that graduating individuals may immediately have limited career outcomes in accordance with their degree-granting institutions.

Finally, we can argue that while AACSB may not take a position on this matter, it is acting indirectly as "Tertius Gaudens". In other words, a third party gets the benefits from the requirements indicated by business schools and HEI in relation to candidates' preference. Or does the continuing misuse of the accreditation standards by accredited institutions undermine the legitimacy of the accreditation?

As we mentioned previously, the AACSB's standards have evolved to the point that a new set of standards has been released in 2020. As indicated by Stephanie Bryant, Executive Vice President and Chief Accreditation Officer AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 2020), these new standards are the consensus agreement on what it should be a quality business school. These are a combination of mission/principles-based, more "outcome focus," and "globally" oriented. After reviewing these standards, we think these could have been an excellent opportunity to address the issue revisited within this manuscript, and one which has been latent for more than 10 years. While responsibility for the interpretation of these standards rests with individual institutions and their evaluators, the accreditation body should address these types of distortions and inconsistencies. Especially considering AACSB espouses guiding principles of "diversity and inclusion" and a "global mindset", there does not appear to be any codification of these principles into their new standards, which seems to be contradictory to the fact that AACSB continues to increase their emphasis on diversity and preparing students to pursue business careers in a diverse global context.

CONCLUSIONS

While the benefits of the AACSB accreditation are highly valuable (Trapnell, 2007; Trifts, 2012), situations like the one described in the current manuscript really make us think that some business schools and Higher Education Institutions are interpreting the accreditation standard in an overzealous way which may create an unhealthy perception of other organizations in the same sector. The empirical evidence we presented validates recruitment practices for business faculty that have been copied between schools with no real logic or rationale. In some cases, organizations will adopt this type of isomorphism with "substantive benefits in addition to social condonement" (Deephouse, 1999; Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997 as cited on Heugens & Lander, 2009).

Although the evidence appears to provide empirically grounded answers to our research question, it can be argued that this paper has some limitations. In particular, the scope of our data collection is narrow and thus collecting a larger data set may help us to provide a more sophisticated statistical analysis. However, since the groups we created for our test are not proportional (in terms of equal number of accredited and non-accredited posts) this may also limit those further analyses. Also, although our intention mentioned before regarding this manuscript was to open a conversation on this issue, to argue generalization of the findings in other schools across campuses may be irresponsible. The publication time on the job ads

selected was random, but clearly, there are more AACSB accredited institutions. We believe it will be insightful to review why this disproportion exists in job ads between AACSB accredited and non-accredited institutions.

One idea for future research that we suggest would be to review the job ads in other major job markets like Europe, as it would be interesting to compare these two perspectives. In addition, we think it would be valuable to provide strong qualitative evidence of why administrators and faculty prefer candidates from AACSB accredited institutions, rather than candidates who have degrees from institutions that are non-accredited, accredited from other accreditation bodies, or accredited by foreign bodies, such as governments or third parties.

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