

Current Status and Challenges of Quality Assurance of Higher Education in the US: Focusing on How Regional Accrediting Agencies Utilize Their Evaluation Results, and the Actual State of Learning Outcomes Assessment

The Certified Evaluation and Accreditation in Japan has its origins in the US accreditation system. JIHEE evaluation standards and methods were developed with reference to insights gained to a considerable degree from our research on the US accreditation system. Now that 20 years have passed since the start of our accreditation system, JIHEE has decided to go back to its roots and once again conduct this research project to examine the current state of US university accreditation.

In this research, Dr. Yukimasa Hayata (JIHEE Evaluation System Improvement Committee Member/visiting research fellows, Institute of Comparative Law in Japan, Chuo University), who possesses deep expertise in this field, cooperated in a guiding role.

Through literature reviews and interviews, the research examined and analyzed the current state of quality assurance of higher education specifically by regional accrediting agencies in the US, and explored challenges they are facing within the system.

Additionally, we focused particularly on examining how regional accrediting agencies in the US address the key challenges facing Japan's accreditation system: “enhancing evaluation efficiency” and “reducing evaluation burdens.”

This research report compiles findings from three regional accrediting agencies: the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), and the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC); as well as three quality assurance-related organizations: the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), and the

Lumina Foundation. Online interviews were also conducted with the three organizations underlined.

The research revealed that the US accreditation system has strengthened the role of “educational program evaluation” to protect “student learning” and “the rights to study,” while also intensifying oversight of universities at which there are concerns regarding compliance with accreditation standards. Also, requiring universities to implement “teach-out” procedures has become a mandatory duty of regional accrediting agencies. We found that enhancing the efficiency of quality assurance processes remains one of the challenges even in the US, and the workload of evaluating regional accrediting agencies continues to steadily increase.