Institutional accreditation has lots of moving parts. Some have seen it as like a cloud of words, requirements, deadlines, documents, and consequences that slowly seeps over the campus. I’m occasionally invited to give a high-level summary of the ways in which we touch the life of a college. I like to call them our “points of entry” in order to add some precision to the many small interactions that can get lost in a multi-year, multi-part process. Staying above the weeds, here are key areas where ACCJC seeks to validate the complex work of a member college and some of the lines of inquiry our teams pursue to support their findings.

- **Institutional mission.** Is the mission formally endorsed by the governing bodies? Is it embraced as a focusing, energizing statement across the institution? Does it define the core purposes and priorities of an institution of higher learning within its distinctive context? How can stakeholders, including peer reviewers, know the degree to which it is being fulfilled?

- **Institutional effectiveness.** Since the central mission of our members is student learning and achievement, how effective is the college in achieving that goal? Is the college ensuring all categories of students are enjoying the same levels of achievement? Are appropriate metrics being designed, obtained, and used to drive increased effectiveness? Is there a sufficiently robust institutional research function to inform ongoing effectiveness conversations across the college?

- **Institutional stability.** Since a college represents a very large investment of time and resources by students, families, taxpayers, and employees, how does it ensure that this large, multi-part operation will continue to be strong. When students enroll – with many of them incurring debt in the process – how can they be assured that the college will still be there, going strong, when it is time for them to received their promised credential?

- **Institutional integrity.** Does the institution speak of itself with precision and consistency to all its audiences? Does it make promises it can’t keep? Does it describe its degree offerings and supporting services accurately, completely, and consistently? Does it formulate and follow operational policies and practices that represent best practices in higher education?

- **Institutional operations.** To be an effective institution, are all its pieces working together to achieve its goals? Is the governing board adopting and following best practices? Is campus leadership empowered and trusted to address the college’s challenges and champion its future? Do all categories of employees enjoy the support they need and the participatory voice essential to effective performance in their areas?

- **Institutional improvement.** Are there quality improvement processes embedded in the very culture of the college? Are there deep and sustained discussions, supported by data, about how the institution can improve? Is the institution dynamically responsive to the rapidly changing ecosystem of higher education? Are resources allocated in alignment with needed improvements? How does the college know if its changes are achieving their desired ends?

I know; it’s a daunting list. What is more, this sophisticated task of analysis and reporting is conducted by volunteers! Who else, however, would be more qualified to do this work than
committed, trained, and collaborative education professionals for whom the effectiveness of higher education matters deeply? Accreditation is so much more than checking boxes, counting books, or reading surveys. It’s about people actively caring about people; it’s about professional educators engaging in a well-defined process on behalf of our students. I wouldn’t expect anything less.