

# Expert-panel accreditation evaluation-practices: an autoethnographic case study of the Community of Madrid

*Juan Arturo Rubio Arostegui*

UNIVERSIDAD ANTONIO DE NEBRIJA/UNIVERSIDAD DE VALENCIA. MADRID, SPAIN

[jrubioa@nebrija.es](mailto:jrubioa@nebrija.es)

ORCID: 0000-0002-7236-2866

Received: 03/01/2017

Accepted: 12/04/2017

## ABSTRACT

Accreditation is defined by the European Higher Education Area quality-assurance agencies as a key element in quality management and continuous improvement in university teaching-learning processes, and is an institutional practice that started to be developed in 2014 in Spain. This article illustrates the case of the Community of Madrid Quality Agency, as case study analysis through my experience as a panel member for the accreditation of higher-education qualifications. Methodologically, it is based on an autoethnographic approach and uses the theory of symbolic interactionism to reveal and analyse the evaluative process and culture. For this purpose, two analytical axes were drawn: student learning-outcomes and the value of the human resources assigned to the degree in terms of their academic research, both criteria which the quality agencies consider to be critical for a favourable final report. The interactions of the expert panel at the different stages of the accreditation consideration-process, based on these two criteria, are presented with the aim that future case studies will test them in the context of collaborative learning, helping to achieve the greatest possible academic rigor in the accreditation process.

**Keywords:** accreditation, agentification, evaluative cultures, peer review, learning outcomes.

**Corresponding author:** Juan Arturo Rubio Arostegui, Universidad Antonio de Nebrija, Campus de Madrid-Princesa Santa Cruz de Marcenado, 27, 28015 Madrid.

**Suggested citation:** Rubio, J. A. (2017). Expert-panel accreditation evaluation-practices: an autoethnographic case study of the Community of Madrid. *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society*, 2, 151-162. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2017-12>

## INTRODUCTION: ACCREDITATION AS AN AXIS IN THE PROCESSES OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Accreditation is one of the axes upon which quality management at most universities pivots. Coming from the Anglo-Saxon culture, accreditation first appeared at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, is characterised by the open-curriculum model, and is

largely unregulated. It contrasts with the historically closed and strongly regulated curricular models in the geographical environments of continental Europe. Accreditation has been implemented by the European Higher Education Area since the beginning of the 21st century, disruptively so in the university culture, thus producing one of the most prominent changes in this system in recent history.

The agentification of universities has some very specific effects depending on the geographical and institutional environment in question. For example, in Great Britain accreditation also deepened the stratification of higher education institutions, reinforcing university hierarchies through their reputation, which in turn, is based on research indicators (Brennan and Williams, 2004). The evaluation culture that became part of degree-program accreditation is better suited to the British arm's length principle in which the academic and political are differentiated, than the Spanish or French institutional context—as previously studied in the case of cultural policies and public cultural facilities (Rius Ulldemolins and Rubio Arostegui, 2013, 2016; Rubio Arostegui, 2016). From this comparative institutional context, this manuscript aims to provide details about the practices implemented in academic-environment evaluation cultures and accreditation styles in Spain, a phenomenon that began in the Community of Madrid, as well as in the rest of Spain, in 2014.

The author's own experience as an evaluator inside the accreditation process is the leitmotif of this work, which aims to improve these evaluation processes and to contribute to the debate about how to best carry them out; the work starts from the premise that this can be achieved through collaborative learning in an institutional environment of transparency. It is clear that, through higher-education program accreditation, public administrations are allocating human and financial resources with the aim of creating constant improvement in university degrees. Therefore, the goal of this article is also to publicly promote the value of accreditation both within the university community and in society in general. This is because in more institutionalised contexts such as that of the United States, among other factors, the lack of rigor in the process is frequently criticised (Ewell, 2015; Gillen, Bennett, and Vedder, 2010; Dickeson, 2006).

### *Methodological approach*

Ethnography, as discussed by Pabian (2014), is not a predominant research tool in higher education, even though there is growing academic interest in the potential of the ethnographic approach in education. This is

reflected in the newly emerging scientific literature and in the organisation of conferences linking ethnography and education—most recently in Spain in 2013 in the Spanish National Research Council headquarters<sup>1</sup>. However, the autoethnographic perspective, in terms of the everyday academic practices of evaluative cultures, does have some precedent (Meneley and Young, 2005). Using this approach here, I try to highlight the processes involved in evaluative decision-making, based on the evaluator's own subjectivity and interaction with other panel members.

One of the purposes of this article is to expose the routines and practices of peer review through my experience as an undergraduate and master's degree-level accreditation-panel member for the Community of Madrid Quality Agency and the Knowledge Foundation Madri+D (abbreviated as FCM in Spain). Therefore, one of the goals of this paper is to present the characteristics of peer review as an interactive process between evaluators and to show how, within this dynamic, the initial expert assessments of degree-level qualifications are transformed during the course of the negotiation, finally reaching the end of the process with the drafting of the panel's report. This process is concluded when the final report (taking the expert panel's original opinion as an essential reference), is prepared by a branch committee and is published on the FCM and the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport's Registry of Universities, Centres and Titles (abbreviated in Spanish as RUCT) websites.

Thus, autoethnography as a self-reflection exercise (Garfinkel, 1967), helps to reveal the procedures, feelings, attitudes, and values of panel members during the assessment process, while trying to mitigate and shorten the distance in discursive practice between claims of what will be done and what actually is done<sup>2</sup>. This article aims to tackle the subject

1 <https://cieye.wordpress.com/>

2 Self-reflection is understood in the same way as when we reflect upon our own research processes in the spirit of criticism, and where strategic use of one's meta-cognitive capacity can accommodate emotional dimensions.

matter by taking a symbolic interactionism approach, under the pretence that this contributes legitimacy, both to the process of reaccreditation and to the agencialised context of the Spanish university system itself. Regarding other types of academic evaluations such as academic journal peer-review assessments or even certain competitive calls for research projects, the accreditation-process evaluation involves interaction between the expert panel members.

Under the premise of symbolic interactionism we can analyse the dynamics created by the interaction between different social subsystems (academics, students, and employers, among others) involved in the evaluation process. These are represented by the panel secretary, academics, and students at the visits that take place at the university centres presenting their qualification-programs for reaccreditation. In accordance with Lamont (2015), we understand that degree-program accreditation, specifically the peer-review phase of the assessment, is an emotional and interactive process: consensus building is fragile and requires emotional and rational effort on the part of the panel members.

*The practice of degree-program evaluation, another variation of academic peer review*

What values and criteria are considered when evaluating the accreditation? In academic peer-review evaluation, key values such as creativity and innovation—and how, in turn, these are defined in different ways according to the field of knowledge and the discipline in question (Lamont, 2015)—do not carry the same weight in the accreditation as they may have in journal or research project peer-review assessments. Notwithstanding, as discussed in other work (Mahoney, 1977; Smith, 2006; Bocking, 2005), although an assessment-rubric similar to that of academic journal reviewers is applied in the accreditation evaluation-process, in practice, emotional and extracognitive factors with affiliations and phobias towards certain focuses or lines of investigation, are also considered. In short, in every academic evaluation, a contextual interaction process occurs in which academics are inserted into a position of power, endowing them with

disproportionate symbolic ‘capital’ (Bourdieu, 2008). Thus, the evaluator’s *habitus*, which is necessarily tied to their position in the academic field, determines the results of the peer review, in which the concept of objectivity, at least as understood in the sciences, is difficult to sustain.

According to the FCM Evaluation Guide (whose full title is translated from Spanish as: *Evaluation guide for renewing the accreditation of the official undergraduate and Master’s degrees*, 2014) the goals of the official university degree-program accreditation essentially refer firstly to testing if the qualification program was developed according to the stipulations set out in the certified report, secondly, to provide transparency and to disseminate information about the degree, thirdly, to make recommendations and suggestions based on continuous improvement, and finally, to implement the accreditation process as a key moment within the framework of university agentification.

The objectives, features, and values associated with these expert panel functions are defined and sequenced according to the FCM guide, and can be summarised as: (a) understanding the criteria for the reaccreditation; (b) preparation of an individual report that must be shared with all of the panel members prior to the visit; (c) depending on whether the member’s role is as a contributor or president, taking responsibility for producing the final visit report from the visit for its subsequent use by the accreditation branch committee. Once these axiological and functional premises have been defined, we enter into the panel evaluation process, establishing the following phases:

- (1) Reading the degree-program self-report prepared beforehand by the degree coordinator.
- (2) Evaluation and analysis of any other documents and evidence associated with the qualification.

The quality of reports produced for the different degree-programs is very disparate and this determines the evaluator’s position regarding the qualification at the start of the panel member’s individual-report

writing process. In our case, this document, notoriously, influences the initial perception of the degree-program. Therefore, a well-written report that understands and recognises the strengths and weaknesses of the course, and that provides a coherent discourse based on evidence and data, predisposes the evaluator to like it, even before assessing the other required documentation such as the certified report, previous monitoring report, and any other data, ratios, and indicators. Given the disparity in the quality of the coordinator self-reports, they should be evaluable. This is because in certain cases not even the minimum requirements are met and it appears that their authors are unaware of the university normative environment. Here, I give the following example (individual report on an undergraduate-degree course, 2016):

In the introduction, this individual report states that the necessary modifications were not requested because: “the law for educational reform (Spanish Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December), which allows for a three-year undergraduate degree-course structure, restrained the proposal in order to provide more time for reflection on the desirability of these changes in one direction or another.”

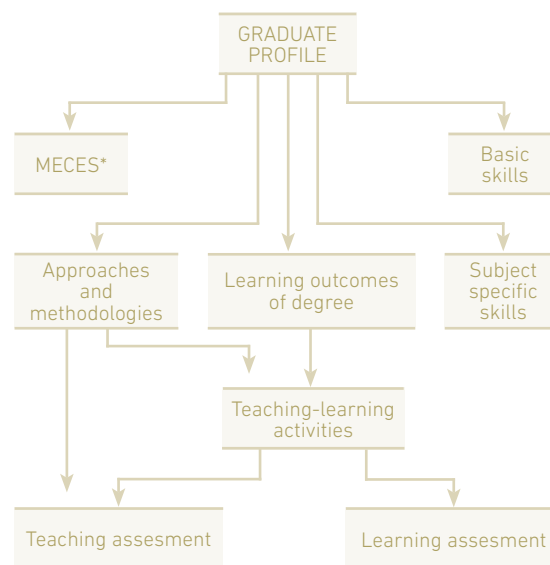
Based on their own evidence, this statement is erroneous and serious on two counts: on the one hand, the law that they refer to (LOMCE) does not apply to universities, and so it does not affect how these institutions should plan their studies. On the other hand, the Spanish Organic Laws are not an obstacle to requesting a modification during the verification of these degree courses. Ignorance of the basic legal architecture of university education in Spain and its articulation in the European Higher Education Area is a very negative factor which is evident in this individual report.

(Individual report on an undergraduate degree program, 2016).

Another key document for consultation is the certified report, the changes that are made to it over time, and the monitoring report produced by the Quality Agency. Given the volume of the documents included

in the certified reports, the most difficult task is to get a clear general idea of the degree-program and its development. To do this, I try to apply this conceptual map:

**Figure 1: The centrality of the graduate profile and of the learning outcomes in the development of degree programs**



\*MECES; Qualifications Framework for Spanish Higher Education

SOURCE: Rubio (2014b). Taken from: *Workshop on the assessment of learning outcomes in the process of university degree-program accreditation* (Universidad Antonio de Nebrija).

This scheme allows us to link the graduate profile to the degree program in question, aligning with the Qualifications Framework for Spanish Higher Education (MECES; Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior in its original Spanish) and the basic skills required for the degree course, and beyond these, with subject-specific skills and learning outcomes. This is a theoretical written approximation that can be used by the panel member to draft their report. It can also be contrasted at the subsequent centre-visit when evidence in the form of coursework, exams, virtual-campus content, or training activities recorded in an audiovisual format, from three or four selected subjects comprising the course, are made available to the panel.

In this article it is impossible to cover all of the many assessment-process dimensions and criteria that the evaluator must complete according to the standardised reference model. Therefore, here we will focus on only two dimensions of the degree-program that are considered by the quality agencies as ‘critical criteria’: learning outcomes and the value of the human resources teaching the course based on their individual research profiles. If these criteria receive a negative evaluation it could lead to closure of the degree-program as the result of an unfavourable report. In terms of the learning outcomes, there is usually a lack in theoretical alignment with the work proposed in the degree course, and this must subsequently be underpinned in teaching practice and student learning. Table 1 shows an example of such an alignment for the work proposed in a degree course; I constructed it when writing the coordinator self-report for the FCM when applying for reaccreditation of the Performing Arts degree at the University of Antonio de Nebrija in the first call for accreditation renewal in 2014.

In this case, the undergraduate end-of-degree coursework was taken as a reference model because it was impossible to perform this exercise with all of the work undertaken for every subject comprising

the course curriculum. Moreover, panel members are usually grateful for the conceptual development of a selection of degree-course topics so that they can visualise the alignment between the common framework MECES skills and the degree course’s learning outcomes. This alignment could also be shown with the specific skills which are necessarily tied to the course graduate profile.

Regarding the value of the human resources teaching within the degree program, as measured by their research profile, we try to examine the relationship between the academic researcher ‘capital’ and their links with the degree course. In some degrees this is very obvious and the links are sufficiently explicit, for example given the number of six-year-terms completed by the degree’s academics, links to the field of knowledge, or lines of research with a similar profile to the degree. On other occasions insufficient evidence is provided or the researcher capital simply does not exist. This can be seen in the example below (undergraduate course assessment report, 2016):

The university teaching-staff research activity requirements are not included in the certified report, its amended version, or in the coordinator self-report. Nor is there any evidence to allow

**Table 1. Example of the alignment between the MECES undergraduate skills with the undergraduate end-of-degree coursework**

GENERAL SKILLS EVALUATED IN THE UNDERGRADUATE COURSE/LEARNING RESULTING FROM THE PROGRAM	RELATIONSHIP TO THE BLOOM TAXONOMY	RELATIONSHIP TO MECES SKILLS
Capacity for analysis and synthesis	ANALYSIS-SYNTHESIS	A/C
Ability to manage information	KNOWLEDGE	A/C
Ability to apply knowledge in practice	APPLICATION	A/B/C
Ability to solve problems	APPLICATION	B/C/E
Critical ability and capacity for self-criticism	EVALUATION	C/D
Creativity in approach or development of the work	EVALUATION	D/F

SOURCE: taken from the accreditation coordinator self-report for the Performing Arts Undergraduate degree at the University of Antonio de Nebrija (2014).

the research activity of the teaching-staff to be evaluated at the individual level (in the case of [...]) and there is a lack of experience: none of the research staff at [...] have completed terms of more than six years, either at the group level or at the institutional level. Similarly, there was no evidence for teaching-staff research activity (their performance in terms of publications at different levels in indexed scientific journals or their impact in their research-activity fields) mentioned in the course coordinator's self-report.

The issue of the research activity undertaken by the teaching-staff affiliated with the course has recently been rescaled by other Spanish quality agencies following the experience of the first accreditations in the Spanish university system. Therefore, as discussed by the Quality Agency of the University System of Catalonia (AQU; in Catalan, the *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya*) in a 2016 review of additional factors in the accreditation of qualifications, the interaction between research and teaching activity should strongly influence the process of reaccrediting the degree-program: "the interaction between investigation and teaching in the training program benefits student learning; specifically, how research activity in the discipline is used to reinforce teaching and student learning" (AQU, p. 25).

Therefore, we understand that research activity should be referenced within the following criteria:

– Organisation and development of the degree (Criterion 1):

- Highlighting undergraduate/master's degree coursework derived from research activity in the research groups linked to the degree course or if they are related to research lectures in disciplines connected to the degree.
- If there is evidence that the undergraduate/master's course has emerged within the framework of research projects or research activity consultancy contracts.

- For master's degrees with a research orientation, it is understood that the course is obliged to relate the degree work to the group's research activity or with that of teaching groups, and this should extend to the doctorate-level, if there is one.

– Academic staff (Criterion 4):

- Synthetic indicators of academic staff research activity: experience measured as the number of six-year-terms completed, H-index, i-10 index, or other indicators normally used in the research domain, even though these give a numerical value that encompass all of the scientific production of a professor. However, this must be contextualised within the scientific discipline of the degree being evaluated.
- Research results publications or participation in innovative research or consulting projects that could impact the teaching of the degree.

– Learning outcomes (Criterion 6):

- In many cases, innovation in teaching is a consequence of a prior research process.
- Involvement or participation of students in research projects, according to their level of training at different stages of their undergraduate or master's formative trajectory is an indicator of links to the university's research and teaching activity.

This scheme allows criteria 1, 4, and 6—all critical to the reaccreditation process—to be checked a priori from a research activity focus, beyond the other indicators recommended by the FCM Guide such as the percentage of doctors per research group teaching in the degree.

---

## INTERACTION DURING THE VISIT AND NEGOTIATION OF THE ASSESSMENTS

Every panel member must prepare a report prior to their campus visit, however, we could call the process of constructing this report 'the rubbish-bin model' (Lamont, 2015) because the decisions made

by different panel members can be so contradictory. In fact this also usually occurs even in the critical dimensions, even though the final report may achieve a high degree of consensus between panel members. Incidentally, the panel normally comprises two academics and one student, although in the case of artistic degrees a professional from the field in question is added—whether a professor in higher arts education or not. The panel secretary is responsible for compiling all of the panel members' assessments into one document which can then be refined to reach agreement among the panel, even though the final word on the draft goes to the president, who concludes the visit by reading an oral report and signing the final visit report.

The dimensions for managing the degree are assigned beforehand in agreement with the FCM Guide, thus establishing that the critical criteria must be the academic staff, the learning outcomes, and performance and satisfaction indicators. However,

some other dimensions can trigger an unfavourable assessment of the degree-program, such as the organisation and development of the course or the material resources. The agreements and disagreements between panel members are also exemplified in the different assessments that are given according to the standardised criteria on a qualitative A, B, C, and D scale that graduates from excellence to non-compliance with the required minimum. At the visit to the campus the panel members meet face-to-face, different assessments are exchanged, and each member tries to argue their vision of the degree-program both in general and in terms of its dimensions. This is also where the degree-program indicators are contrasted.

Limiting ourselves in this article only to analysis of research activity and learning outcomes, interviews conducted with the teaching staff and management team at the centre and the university should clear up any doubts there may be about the research indicators. If the degree assigns professors and research groups

**Table 2. Evolution of the research activity assessment in the *Human Resources* criterion through the three reports comprising the degree-program accreditation phase**

	REFERENCE TO THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY DEFICITS OF THE TEACHING-STAFF AFFILIATED WITH THE UNDERGRADUATE COURSE (HUMAN RESOURCES)
<b>Individual panel member report</b>	States: "The university teaching-staff research activity requirements are not established in the certified report, its amended version, or in the coordinator self-report. Nor is there any evidence to allow the research activity of the teaching-staff to be evaluated at the individual level (in the case of [...]) and there is a lack of research experience: and none of the staff at [...] have completed terms of more than six-years, either at the group level or at the institutional level. Similarly, there was no evidence for teaching-staff research activity (their performance in terms of publications at different levels in indexed scientific journals or their impact in their research activity fields) mentioned in the coordinator's self-report."
<b>Panel final report</b>	States: "Implementation of a tool for assessing the merits of individual and group research activity is recommended."
<b>Branch committee report</b>	There was no reference to the research activity in the human resources criterion.

SOURCE: produced internally

with plausible activity, they will be able to provide specific answers to any questions the panel members may ask, for example about the lines of research, level of international research activity, and research projects being carried out. Another very different matter is how much this evidence is valued by the panel, who have different perceptions about the value of different research activities. Thus, as shown in Table 2, the described degree-program assessment (which was evaluated in 2016) started out with one very negative individual panel-member report on research activity indicators, which evolved during the accreditation process, gradually losing this negative evaluation at each stage of the assessment until it practically disappeared in the final branch committee report.

Finally, so all of the panel members would approve it, we insisted on once again mentioning the aforementioned deficit by enclosing the following as a comment in the final report: “In the case of [...] the research activity indicators (in terms of experience measured as six-year research terms served, research groups, and publication performance) are very weak and should feature in some way [in the final panel report].” In this case there is no doubt that the panel president did not share the same opinion on the assessment as the academic contributor when gauging the research activity. Consequently, this negative dimension disappeared in the branch committee report because of the weight of the president’s opinion. In the final corrections proposed for the panel report, and even after its finalisation, panel members sometimes make their disagreement clearly known, as discussed by another panel member in an e-mail written after the report was finished:

The Report includes everything that we agreed upon for the summary. However, I remain deeply concerned because the Spanish university system is proposing undergraduate degree courses as poor as this one and Assessment Agencies are validating them. It is reasonable to allow degree-program coordinators time to implement improvements to these courses, especially because they do not yet have the

experience of having concluded the first year of graduation from the program. However, they are being granted a vote of confidence in order to test if, in the next 6 years, they are capable of normalising something that started out chaotically. (E-mail sent by a panel member to the rest of the panel).

With regard to learning outcomes, at the visit the panel members can gauge the learning of the students enrolled in the course resulting from them following the subjects the panel had previously approved as part of the program. Paradoxically, when the evidence of learning outcomes in the form of coursework, exams, or other supporting material is available, it is difficult to get an idea of the training by using the MECES framework. Some panel members have no knowledge of the qualifications framework or the learning-outcomes standardisation process, both at university and non-university teaching levels. Ignorance of the cognitive frameworks, or disagreement between panel members in terms of the beliefs and values regarding learning outcomes, leads to a scenario of disorientation between those without this knowledge or who do not believe in it. This makes it difficult to assess if the activities evaluated are in line with those described in the certified report, and consequently with the undergraduate or master’s degree MECES framework.

Thus, in the debates at the visit the fact that one of the members does not start from the premise of MECES means that the assessment can become quite difficult to agree upon because there is no framework to use as a reference model or rubric prior to evaluating if the activities match those established in the certified report. This is a very difficult matter that, as noted by Ashwin (2009), goes beyond the accreditation itself because, even in our own teaching practice it is very difficult to distinguish differences at the level of MECES between undergraduate and Master’s degree courses on similar subjects (e.g. the bachelor’s degree course in Primary and Secondary Education and the Master’s training course for Secondary Teaching at Universidad Antonio de Nebrija). The



**Table 3. Evolution of the learning outcomes evaluation through the three degree-program reports**

	REFERENCE TO THE LEARNING RESULTS
<b>Individual panel member report</b>	<p>States: "Therefore, the following is required: a) an ad hoc definition of the learning outcomes, linked to the skills associated with the degree program and its subjects or materials and b) a relationship between the learning outcomes and the six MECES skills for the course level." [...]</p> <p>"It is crucial that teaching must accomplish the ultimate objective of seeking and achieving deeply focused and committed student learning."</p> <p>The panel member's comment at the end of the report document also states:</p> <p>"Some of the evidence we saw, as in the case of the work we observed for the [...] course, was clearly insufficient to meet the requirements the of MECES undergraduate framework.</p>
<b>Panel final report</b>	<p>States: "The evidence shown in the case of [...] demonstrates that the performance level could be increased...."</p> <p>"Work must be done, both at theoretical and practical levels, to increase the level of some of the material which produces poor learning outcomes."</p>
<b>Branch committee report</b>	<p>States: "The evidence shown in the case of [...] demonstrates that the performance level could be substantially increased...."</p>

SOURCE: produced internally

pedagogy suggested by Sin (2015), which yields to the utilitarianism of learning outcomes with a view to possible employability, has not yet reached academic fields. Moreover, in some cases of artistic degree courses applying for accreditation, we have found that the degree-course subject student-assessment methods implemented are insufficiently rigorous—for example, only a sheet with a written review or commentary of film may be submitted instead of coursework or exams as evidence of learning.

### *Conclusions*

This manuscript provides details about the practices implemented in academic-environment evaluation cultures and accreditation styles in Spain, a phenomenon that began in the Community of

Madrid, alongside the rest of Spain, in 2014. Through the author's experience as a panel member, it tries to apply rigor to the process of evaluation practice so that in the future it can be contrasted with other panel practices and thus, used to improve the quality of university evaluation. Academic peer-review creativity and innovation in the process of accrediting undergraduate and master's degrees plays a secondary role to the values generated during peer interactions. Similarly, the culture of agentification that pivots upon key concepts such as skills, learning outcomes, continuous improvement, and use of indicators of student satisfaction with the teaching, has not spread equally among different panel member types, especially among the generation of lifelong teachers that usually form part of these expert panels.

Quality agencies' emphasis on testing whether degree programs have been developed in accordance with the stipulations set out in the certified report can become a factor that impedes the identification of better and more innovative ways of developing and managing university courses, as Ewell (2015) points out in the case of the United States. In the same way, in some cases, educational innovation has resulted from the digital transition of teaching-learning processes. It is very probable that certain types of educational innovations will go unnoticed by panels where the president and/or the academic contributor are unfamiliar with digital training environments. In this respect I tend to agree with Ashwin (2009) that only very few European countries (for example, Sweden and Great Britain) have a strategy and policy in place with public resources to support higher education teaching.

The two criteria selected for analysis in this accreditation case study—learning outcomes and the value of the human resources in terms of their research activity—highlight the differing logic between the panel members. In the first case, as noted by Ashwin (2009) and Sin (2015), the difficulty results from moving from abstract to tangible learning outcomes and the tensions and problems that the

panel members struggle with to reach an agreement. This is especially the case if these members do not share a common attitude to the processes of learning standardisation and the MECES framework. In this sense, the quality agencies' efforts to standardise learning outcomes have not yet had the desired effect on the degree-program coordinators or the evaluators themselves. On the other hand, the trend towards gauging learning outcomes by their measurability and employability as one of the main values of education, is detrimental to acknowledging the educational experience (and thus, satisfaction) of students, as shown by Eisner (2004) in the dynamics of education teaching practice in the United States.

Regarding the contribution of research activity to developing the degree course and its innovation, the assurance of a minimum quantity of academic capital, makes it much easier to contrast and compare learning outcomes. Although the tendency (or at least that expressed by the AQU in Catalonia) is to give greater weight to researcher capital in the accreditation of undergraduate and master's degrees, on certain panels there is a lack of agreement between the academic panel members on the value of the activity, and so the panel president's opinion eventually prevails.

---

## REFERENCES

- AQU (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya). (2016). *Guía para la evaluación de las dimensiones adicionales en la acreditación de las titulaciones oficiales de grado y máster*. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at [http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc\\_93243070\\_1.pdf](http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_93243070_1.pdf)
- Amani, H. (2012). Autoethnography as a genre of qualitative research: A journey inside out. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(5), 585-606.
- ANECA (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación). (2013). *Guía de apoyo para la redacción, puesta en práctica y evaluación de los resultados del aprendizaje*. Madrid: ANECA.
- Ashwin, P. (2009). *Analysing teaching-learning interactions in higher education: Accounting for structure and agency*. London: Continuum.
- Bocking, S. (2005). Gatekeeper or helpful counsel? Practices and perceptions in academic peer review. In A. Meneley, and D. J. Young (ed.), *Auto-Ethnographies: The anthropology of academic practices* (p. 67-79). Toronto: Broadview Press.
- Bourdieu, P (2008). *Homo Academicus*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

- Brennan, J., and Williams, R. (2004). Accreditation and related regulatory matters in the UK. In S. Schwarz, and D. F. Westerheijden (ed.). *Accreditation and evaluation in the European higher education area*. Higher education dynamics (p. 465-490). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Coates, H. (2015). Assessment of learning outcomes. In A. Curaj et al. (ed.), *The European higher education area: between critical reflections and future* (p.339-414). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Curaj, A. et al. (ed.). *The European higher education area: between critical reflections and future policies*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Dickeson, R. (2006). *The need for accreditation reform, paper prepared for the secretary's commission on the future of higher education*. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/dickeson.pdf>
- Eaton, J. S. (2015). *An overview of US accreditation*. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <https://www.chea.org/userfiles/uploads/Overview%20of%20US%20Accreditation%202015.pdf>
- Eisner, E. W. (2004). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 5(4), 1-13.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., and Bochner, A. P. (2010). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>
- European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education. (2013). *Learning outcomes in quality assurance and accreditation: Principles, recommendations and practice*. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <http://www.eacaconsortium.net>
- Ewell, P. (2015). Transforming institutional accreditation in U.S. higher education. *National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)*. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <http://www.nchems.org/wp-content/uploads/GatesAccreditationWhitePaper.pdf>
- FCM (Fundación para el Conocimiento madri+d). (2014). *Guía de evaluación para la renovación de la acreditación de títulos oficiales de grado y máster*. [Versión del 10 de octubre de 2014, v3]. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at [https://www.madrimasd.org/uploads/acreditacion/doc/2015-2016\\_Guia\\_de\\_renovacion\\_de\\_la\\_acreditacion.pdf](https://www.madrimasd.org/uploads/acreditacion/doc/2015-2016_Guia_de_renovacion_de_la_acreditacion.pdf)
- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gillen, A., Bennett, D. L., and Vedder, R. (2010). *The inmates running the asylum? An analysis of higher education accreditation*. Washington, DC: Center for College Affordability and Productivity.
- Lamont, M. (2015). *Cómo piensan los profesores. El curioso mundo de la evaluación académica por dentro*. Madrid: CIS.
- Lucas, L. (2012). Ethnographic Journeys in Higher Education. In S. Delamont (ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (p. 170-180). Cheltenham: Elgar.
- Mahoney, M. J. (1977). Publication prejudices: an experimental study of confirmatory bias in the peer review system. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 1(2), 161-175.
- Meneley, A, and Young, D. J. (ed.). (2005). *Auto-Ethnographies: The Anthropology of Academic Practices*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Pabian, P. (2014). Ethnographies of higher education: introduction to the special issue. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 4(1), 6-17.
- Rius, J., and Rubio, J.A. (2016). Política cultural y grandes equipamientos culturales en el Estado Español: los retos de gestión y gobernanza en el contexto internacional. In J. Rius and J. A. Rubio, *Treinta años de políticas culturales en España* (p.185-230). València: Universitat de València.
- Rius, J., and Rubio, J. A. (2013). The governance of national cultural organisations: comparative study of performance contracts with the main cultural organisations in England, France and Catalonia. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19, 249-269.

- Rubio, J. A. (2014a). La auto-etnografía como enfoque metodológico en la realización de los trabajos de fin de grado. Un análisis de caso en el grado de artes escénicas de la Universidad Antonio de Nebrija. In R. Alvarado (ed.), *Actividades artísticas y educación: usos y prácticas* (p.113-120). Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.
- Rubio, J. A. (2014b). Taller para la evaluación de los resultados de aprendizaje en los procesos de acreditación de los títulos universitarios [electronic]. In *III Jornada de Docencia Universitaria: Los resultados del aprendizaje*. Madrid: Universidad Antonio de Nebrija.
- Sin, C. (2015). Teaching and Learning: A Journey from the Margins to the Core in European Higher Education Policy. In A. Curaj et al. (ed.), *The European higher education area: between critical reflections and future* (p. 325-342). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Thrift, N. (2011). Why so few ethnographies? *The Chronicle of Higher Education Blog*. Accessed on the 14th of June 2017 at <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/why-so-few-ethnographies/28314>

---

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Juan Arturo Rubio Arostegui is a senior professor in Philosophy and Education Sciences. He has a Master's degree in Cultural Management and has a doctorate in Political Science and Sociology from *Universidad Complutense*, Madrid. He has taught in the fields of cultural management and educational and cultural policy at the *Universidad Rey Juan Carlos* since 2002 and at the *Universidad Antonio de Nebrija*, since 2009. He is the main researcher of the group *Comunidades académicas y artísticas* (Artistic and Academic Communities) at the same university and he is also director of its Doctorate School. He is also a member of the *Centre d'Estudis sobre Cultura, Poder i Identitats* (Center for the Study of Culture, Power and Identity), at the *Universitat de València*.

