In search of international quality: The library experience with WASC

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Abstract: This research is based on the experience, changes and processes that the library system of CETYS Universidad has undergone from 2004 to 2014. In this period, CETYS has achieved international certification by the American organization named Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), making it the first university in Mexico to receive this accreditation.

This work highlights the preparations, plans and changes that the library system was required to develop, in order to support the achievement of the accreditation in 2011 and the programmed adjustments that need to be taken into account to maintain such accreditation in 2016. The evidence and data collection method used was a survey; its preliminary results, may be of interest to similar universities working toward accreditations of the same kind.

Keywords: International accreditation of universities libraries. Libraries services, quality improvement. Library services.

1. Introduction
1.1. About CETYS

The *Centro de Enseñanza Técnica y Superior* (CETYS) it is a private nonprofit educational institution, under the auspices of the Instituto Educativo del Noroeste, Asociación Civil. (IENAC). It was established in Baja California, Mexico, which borders the southwestern limits of the United States of America.

CETYS educational system has upper middle level education (equivalent to American high school level), in the traditional and bilingual modalities; we offer 20 professional careers, in the areas of the Social Sciences, Engineering, Business and Administration; we also offer post-graduate degrees with studies primarily in 6 areas: administration, engineering, international business, criminalistics, among others.

The student population is of almost 8,000 full time students, 165 full time faculty, 450 part time faculty, and 400 as administrative staff; a high percentage of this population are regular CETYS system of libraries users.

Its library systems consist of 3 libraries, one in each campus (Ensenada, Mexicali Tijuana). In them we have printed material collections of almost 110,000 volumes, and another 423,793 in electronic digital format; we also have printed magazines, multimedia and, these last resources are subscribed with recognized information service providers. Currently, we have a staff of 24 librarians, 7 have professional studies in library science and 7 are professionals in other areas of knowledge.

1.2. About WASC

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), represents one of the 6 educational regions in which the United States Government has organized its educational system, (Korniejiczuk, 2010); Every region includes a group of states of the U.S.A. and has the purpose of accrediting the processes, systems, educational spaces and plans of the institutions that request it. At the present moment, WASC has accredited prestigious educational systems across North America, for example the University of California Los Angeles, Berkeley, Stanford, San Diego University, California State University and 143 more educational institutions. In México, it has accredited Universidad de las Américas (Puebla), Universidad de Monterrey and the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey (Nuevo León), before it did CETYS.

It looks easy to explain why is important for a Mexican educational institution to be accredited by this North American organization; CETYS is particularly special because it is located in Baja California, a state that borders the state of California, were the quantity of potential students represents an attractive element that would contribute to CETYS Universidad in the area of economic resources and prestige. Still, the search for quality and educational excellence is not underestimated. One of the aims of CETYS is to open and offer professional careers through an e-campus (virtual campus).This would increase the student population to 10,000 students by 2020; therefore an accreditation of such characteristics becomes highly attractive for potential students that demand quality education regardless of the economic cost. (CETYS Development Plan 2020, 2011)

2. WASC Accreditation

For several years now, within the educational centers in Mexico, there is a tendency to improve and have the best quality in each institutional activity and process. Because of this tendency, several certifying and accrediting organizations for educational institutions exist; however it is also desired to count with the certification and accreditation from international bodies, in order to broaden the institutional prestige; in this way we are looking to compete on a global scale.

For CETYS University, the WASC accreditation is important because it is looking for more and better world visibility, projection and competitiveness. The road that leads to WASC accreditation began in 2004 (institutional capacity); in 2005 (eligibility acquirement) and then in 2008 (candidacy acquirement); full accreditation was obtained in 2011. During this process, 16 characteristics and attributes were evaluated (Table 1) the ones that stood the most out were those related to libraries and the learning resources.

TABLE 1.- Criteria to evaluate as an institution

Legitimate authority	Institutional authority
Infrastructure, spaces and characteristics	Resources and financial basis
Government meeting	Administrative capacity
Academic credits and co-validation	Study plan titles and institutional objectives
Operating condition	Teaching personnel
General career components formation	Student and administrative services
Library and learning resources	Learning evidence
Institutional planning and evaluation	Academic programs and organization

While the institution was being evaluated as a whole, the evaluation of the installations/premises (institutional capacity) proceeded. So when the time came, the libraries (along with other areas) were subject to a strict examination. The criteria used and the results are shown in Table 2.

TABLA 2.-Evaluation of the library

Evaluated characteristic	Result
Infrastructure	• Insufficient spaces • Inadequate buildings
Human resources	• Not enough professional personnel • Supporting personnel without proper training • Inappropriate levels and functions • Deficient and unbalanced earnings
Information resources	• Insufficient, inadequate, obsolete • Insufficient budget
Services	• Inadequate and without quality • No linkage with academia • No institutional image

Given the obtained results, an internal commission was created called the "Library Committee", whose members were senior managers/directors, school and academic directors, librarians and specialized American library science experts in the WASC accreditation processes, which were hired as consultants. Their function was to establish the plan of action, prepare the changes to undertake as well as to reunite the necessary and pertinent evidence of every development in each of the areas mentioned. A period of 2 years was established to materialize the 6 necessary changes and improvements that were solicited. The immediate actions to be taken were established, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3.-Actions to realize

Solicited Improvements	Actions
1.- Increment and update the digital and printed collections	Increment budget.
2.-Develop information and teaching abilities	Develop and implement an informational abilities program (for academic personnel)
3.- Comply with the suggested remodeling for Mexicali and Tijuana	The remodeling of Mexicali and Tijuana is resolved, construction in Ensenada as well.
4.- Demonstrate the effectiveness of the relationship between teachers-alumni-library	An entailment program is established (voluntary).
5.- Evidence of library personnel training	A budget for supporting professional studies is established (scholarships).
6.-Show advancement in the new strategic plan of the library (2020 plan)	The evaluation of the previous plan and the creation of the 2020 plan are successfully achieved.

Once the actions for improvement required in 2009 by WASC were realized, the Evaluating Committee visited CETYS in 2011 to make the adequate revision of the evidence and to conduct the corresponding interviews with authorities, directors, administration staff, alumni, librarians and the Library Committee that showed the results obtained up to that time (Table 4).

TABLA 4.-Results of the actions taken

1.- Increment and update the collection	- More than 5,500 obsolete volumes were discarded - The electronic books collection grew from 80,000 to 92,000 volumes - The printed collection grew form 65,000 volumes to 75,000 volumes
2.- Develop abilities	An information literacy development program was implemented, were 150 of

	the academic staff was trained
3.-Remodeling and construction of spaces and buildings	• New building for Ensenada • Wide remodeling for Tijuana, were new spaces were constructed. • Mexicali remodeling (esthetic)
4.- An effective relationship between teachers-alumni-library	• Program for induction and instruction • Program to develop a stronger link with faculty • Participation in meetings for the design and restructuration of subjects being taught
5.- Library personnel training	• All the library personnel participated in the information abilities development course • Professional and postgraduate personnel is hired • Specific activity manuals are generated
6.- New library strategic plan	• Creation of a Library Committee • A web page for library service was created • A special scholarship budget was generated to support professional studies in library science • A new organization chart is generated; activities are reassigned and salary is increased • Permanent instruments are established to evaluate services

Thanks to the commitment and institutional work implied by the implementation of these actions (showed through measurable evidences), in 2011 CETYS Universidad obtained the official accreditation from WASC, thus becoming the 5th university in Mexico with an international certification. From this moment until the year 2016, CETYS Universidad has to keep working in order to maintain the WASC certification.

3. The Survey

One of the commitments with WASC is to gather evidence that the plans and the actions undertaken have generated the expected satisfaction with the patrons by noticing the improvements in the facilities and services; based in other related studies, like those done by Quiroga, Quijano, Vega, Palacios, 2011) and (Schmalbach, Ibarguen, Palacios, 2013), an instrument was designed and generated that was selectively sent to those people that saw and lived the changes made: the alumni, the faculty, the administrative staff, and the librarians; this was done in order to measure the impact of the actions taken. The opinion of the surveyed were asked to know how they perceived the changes, according to a scale from "very bad", to "excellent". The option of a "non perceived" change was also included. Five basic questions were made that

specifically evaluate the areas that WASC requested the library to focus work on in order to improve (Table 5). At the end of the survey the option of an "open comment" was also included.

TABLE 5.Criteria that was evaluated in the applied questionnaire

1.-Libray services
2.- Library infrastructure
3.-General collection and specialized collections
4.- Library personnel
5.-Future Priorities

4. Results

The application of the survey and the reception of opinions was selective, specific results were gathered, according to what we intended to measure. The results obtained show: a) The perception that patrons have over the improvements made throughout the last 4 years (2011-2014), b) How these actions taken have had an impact (in their consideration), and c) what opinions have to be taken into consideration for the future investments that will be made through library initiatives.

The results (Figure 1), shows that the tendency in opinion broadly favorites the "excellence" and the "very good" criterion for question No.1 (services) with 70%, No. 2 (spaces) 62% and No.4 (library personnel) with 77%, being this last one the highest reached percentage. On the other hand question No. 3 (general collection and specialized collections) the criterion with the highest percentage was not "excellence" but "very good" and "good" with 65%. We have to point out that question No.2 indicated a notorious weakness because the opinion, even though favorable, has the lowest percentage (15 points below the highest); in a similar way question No. 3 has a criterion with results of lesser value (there is no excellence criteria), and because of this could also be considered a weakness; not the same as with question No. 1 (services) and No. 4 (librarians) were we can observe the strongest aspects of the library.
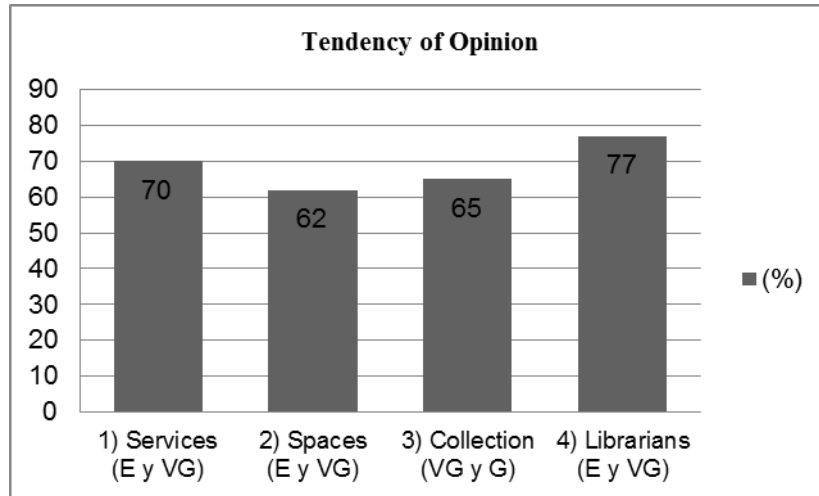
FIGURE No.1.-Tendency of opinion

Question No. 5 asked about "future investments"; the results show a balance in opinion, even though 2 notorious tendencies stand out (see Figure 2), were the evaluated person considered that the main priority for investment with a 27% should be "spaces" in the library; with 23% we have a relatively lesser importance on the investment in "electronic resources". Both data coincide with the results seen in Figure 1 were we can identify these categories as weaknesses that the public identified in libraries and were we should correspondingly apply in near future investments.
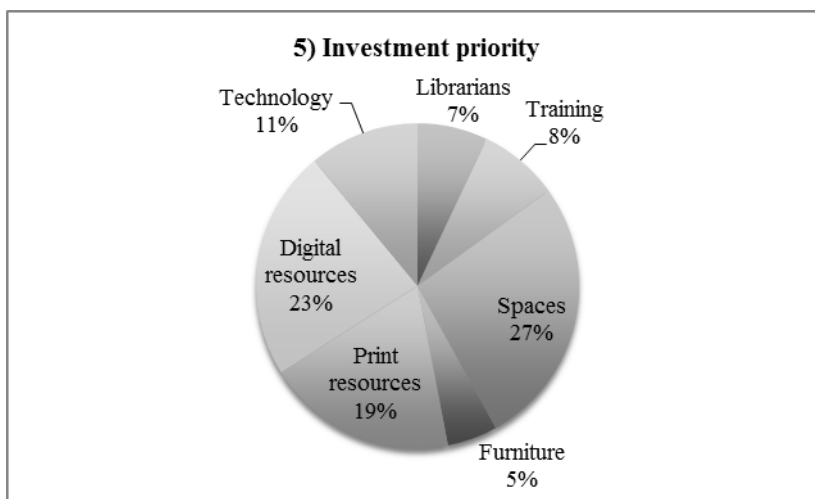

FIGURE No. 2.-Investment priority

Finally, it seems appropriate to mention that the surveyed population had the opportunity to watch the actions and procedures of change being executed thorough libraries improvement processes, which validates their opinion. 50% of the surveyed were academics, 35% administrative staff and 7% librarians. There was also some minimum participation of students and former students; in relation to the number of existing students (8%), because there are only few ex-students that have seen the complete process occur but they were not available to take part in the survey.

5. Conclusions

Nowadays for an educational institution in Mexico, it is vital to possess certifications and accreditations that support their procedures, their academic prestige, and recognition of their quality service. If such an institution desires to have international projection and to actively participate in the prevailing globalization, it is then fundamental that these accreditations and certifications come from international bodies. Institutional inertia forces libraries to unite efforts and transform their services, adapt their spaces and prepare their librarians to confront these new institutional challenges; the patrons are the ones that benefited the most, being themselves the ones that have the final opinion on the subject addressed.

In particular, CETYS Universidad and its library system has made changes, adjustments, constructed buildings, improved its collections and trained its librarians to achieve one of the best international accreditations available to be obtained in Mexico for the moment. The strong and weak points have already been identified through the opinions of surveyed participants. Therefore, the task at hand is to keep working in order to achieve the maximum satisfaction of our users and to find in the best possible institutional capacity, to enforce our digital and electronic collections; also to create a plan that analyses the necessary tasks yet to be implemented in order to improve the spaces and the libraries infrastructure in general.

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