

WOOD AND FIBER

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 10

WINTER 1979

NUMBER 4

ACCREDITATION AND SWST

Accreditation of curriculum or of institutions is a major undertaking and one that must be very carefully evaluated to determine whether it is indeed essential, whether the benefits would be worth the cost and effort, and whether there might be other and simpler ways to achieve the same objectives. My experience extending over about 20 years on the Society of American Foresters' Accrediting Committee convinced me that accreditation is a complex and expensive proposition, involving not only the professional group concerned but the National Commission on Accreditation headquartered in Washington, D.C. and its Regional Groups, that must pass on all accreditation matters before they go to the National Commission. This makes the effort expensive and affordable usually only by such groups as the SAF (20,000–25,000 members), Law (probably over 100,000 members), Engineering (over 200,000 members), and Medicine (probably also well over 100,000 members).

Since the professional groups, such as the SAF in case of Forestry, and the institutions involved pay for accreditation examination visits and all other associated costs, accreditation can become an expensive proposition and probably is beyond the present means of SWST.

The question of the need for accreditation is difficult and troublesome in an area or areas covered by SWST. Unless there are many weak established programs or prospects of many new programs being established, programs that accreditation might help build or keep from being established, it is difficult to make a strong case for accreditation to the National Commission or Regional Associations. The SAF was granted this permission in 1935–1939 when there were too many weak established schools and there were prospects of a dozen or more new schools being established. Also at that time there were already a dozen forestry school graduates available for every forestry job. I do not believe that any of the above situations exist today in the areas covered by SWST.

Since beginning the preparation of these remarks elaborating on those made at the Atlanta SWST meeting, I have discussed the matter further with SWST President Erickson and with FPRS Past President John Haygreen. From these discussions and the above comments, I have personally concluded that it would be a mistake for SWST to become deeply involved at this time in the accreditation of education programs in the forest products area. Also it was suggested in my discussions with Bob Erickson and John Haygreen that SWST might accomplish at least part of its objectives by establishing an educational program review committee that would have the responsibility of reviewing all proposed new education programs and possibly those existing smaller and weaker programs in need of strengthening.

The review committee report might be all that would result from such a procedure, but this could be just as effective in helping build strength in programs as accreditation. This would avoid the whole complicated matter of getting involved with the National and Regional Accreditation Groups, and certainly would be far cheaper. Whether such an evaluation committee would want to establish groups or classes to indicate strength or size I do not know, but I would be inclined to avoid this until several years of experience with a general committee evaluation and report had been tried.

FRANK H. KAUFERT

*Dean Emeritus
College of Forestry
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota*

COMMENTS FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF ON THIS SPECIAL ANNUAL MEETING ISSUE

Readers will note that this issue of *Wood and Fiber* deviates in some respects from previous issues. The papers included are those presented at the 1978 Annual Meeting of SWST. Some were submitted to this journal as regular articles, with abstracts and keywords. Others are mainly transcripts of talks and are less formal, not having either abstracts or keywords. All articles will be indexed, however, in Volume 10(4), with titles appearing under the listing Annual Meeting and authors' names appearing as usual in a separate section. The editorial staff would welcome your response and comments (via letters to the editor) to the important topic of educational goals for the fields of wood science and technology.