

“Paths to Accreditation in Latin America: A Presentation by Paul Branch”

January 11, 2019

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<https://aqueductproject.org>

SUMMARY:

In this discussion, Paul Branch presented the findings of his dissertation, "Viable Paths for the Accreditation of Distance Theological Education Programs in Latin America." Branch introduced his presentation by noting the fragmentation of higher theological education in Latin America, asking the question, "What would be some of the practical educational and missional benefits of strengthening the cooperation of theological institutions in Latin America? [2]" He noted that most theological institutions in Latin America lack accreditation and government recognition, contributing to the fragmentation [5]. As such, he wrote his dissertation to explore paths to accreditation, specifically focusing on schools with online education models [4].

Branch went on to summarize the methodology used in writing his dissertation. Though he was seeking primarily to research accreditation of online theological education in Latin America, he did so by analyzing how this local concern was related to the global context of theological education and accreditation [9]. In this regard, Branch focused his research on accreditation in Latin America, the United States, and the European Higher Education Area [11]. He found that online education has, historically, presented several challenges in each of these contexts [14]. To this end, he discussed the phenomena of phony diplomas and accreditation mills [15-16], the need to contextualize the core values of higher education to be applicable to online education [17-20, 32-33], and the need for broader cooperation among accreditors [21-23].

Following this discussion, Branch reviewed the global precedents in responding to the challenges posed by the rise of online higher education [24]. Under the European Higher Education Area model, all member countries agree to standards regarding the common framework for each type of degree [25]. Additionally, evaluation of learning outcomes is largely competency-based [26] and time invested in all learning activities, rather than just seat-time, is taken into account when assigning credits [28].

Next, Branch began to narrow his focus specifically to Latin America when he identified factors, both internal and external to the theological institution, "that most favored the accreditation of Latin American theological distance education programs [34]." Regarding internal factors, he stressed the value of competency-based models for the evaluation of the achievement of learning outcomes [38-41]. Regarding external factors, Branch reiterated the importance of having accreditation policies that are not biased against online education. For example, a system that does not require face-to-face instruction would be favored as being modality neutral [45].

Finally, Branch offered several recommendations for theological institutions, accreditors, and governments in Latin America [47]. For example, given the value of competency-based assessment, Branch recommended that organizations such as AETAL and Overseas Council aid schools in developing new evaluation techniques [48]. Additionally, he recommended

that accreditation organizations adopt the modality neutral definitions of academic credit that he studied [50-53].

Following Branch's presentation, Jonathan Armstrong opened the panel discussion [56]. First, this conversation centered on suspicion between schools as a hindrance to those schools seeking accreditation [57-60]. Brach agreed that this was an issue that required further study [61]. The panel went on to note how this was primarily a challenge for those who, after attaining a degree, would seek to attend another theological institution [67-70]. Finally, the panel compared the value of government accreditation to the value of private accreditation [81-82].

In the closing minutes, Armstrong called for the panel to discuss practical action-steps that could be taken following the presentation [83]. Keith Anderson recommended that those involved in the leadership of institutions continue to work together to strengthen their online programs [88]. Rick Weymouth noted that, as seminaries further develop their online programs, they could strengthen such programs through partnership with the local church [90-91]. Finally, Orbelina Eguizabal recommended that Branch publish portions of his findings as easily-accessible articles [93]. Following these final thoughts, Armstrong closed the discussion [94].

TRANSCRIPT:

[1] Paul Branch: It's a pleasure to be with you. I graduated from SETECA's (Seminario Teológico Centroamericano) Doctor of Theological Education program in September of last year. And I am happy to have this opportunity to share with you all some of what I learned in my dissertation. But I also look forward to this opportunity to learn from you as we reflect together on issues that are important, vital to theological education in Latin America and the world today. I would like to say thank you Jonathan Armstrong and the Aqueduct Project for this opportunity and I would also like to say thank you to Matthew Dereck who has done a tremendous amount of legwork in pulling this discussion together and involving all of us. And I really do want to say thank you to each one of you for making time to be a part of this conversation. For those of you whose primary language is English, I would like to ask your indulgence for just a minute for my colleagues who understand English but for whom Spanish is their first language. *Spanish Introduction.*

[2] At the end of the presentation we are going to have the opportunity for questions and to reflect together and for commentaries and questions and ideas that you might have. But as I share there are a couple of questions that I would like you to be thinking about. One of the things that became evident in my research is that Latin American higher education, as well as Latin American theological education, is very fragmented. Not only in the same country, but across the region. We are very fragmented. And this issue is relevant to the investigation because this fragmentation in Latin America and in theological education in Latin America weakens the quality of the schools in the region and it poses all sorts of logistical challenges with regards to transfer of credits, to recognition of what you may have studied in one school if you want to transfer to another school, or to recognition of your professional credentials from one school or one country to another. So a question that I would like for you to have in mind as I talk and as we think together is, "What would be some of the practical educational and missional benefits of strengthening the cooperation of theological institutions in Latin America?"

[3] And I hope that some good ideas can come out of our conversation. What sort of cooperative strategies can you suggest? And beyond just the idea, what would that involve and what sort of challenges would these strategies involve if we began to work together in new ways as theological educators in Latin America, in ways that strengthen what each school is doing individually, but also what we are doing together for the kingdom of God.

[4] Many of us have had the experience of getting lost in a big city. I don't know if you've ever been driving in a place where maybe you can even see where you want to go, but the road is so confusing or the road is so difficult that there seems to be no way to get there from the place you find yourself. My investigation has to do with a similar challenge that many Latin American schools face and it's the challenge of achieving accreditation and

achieving government recognition. How do you get there from here? In particular, this study sought to identify viable pathways or viable paths toward accreditation of distance theological education programs in Latin America, roads that will get you from here to there.

[5] We talk about distance theological education broadly, but online education was the primary focus. But many of the findings and the recommendations are applicable to other distance models as well. Now the importance of the subject was underscored by the fact that most theological institutions in Latin America today do not have either private accreditation or government recognition. Most schools are not accredited, and most schools are not recognized by their respective governments. There are some exceptions, but that's the common situation. If this is the case for traditional, face-to-face, bricks and mortar models of theological education in the region, accreditation and government recognition are even more challenging for innovative online programs and other models of distance education. So let's think together about why we need to identify or create new paths to accreditation new paths to government recognition. What are some of the barriers to accreditation of theological institutions in Latin America?

[6] Well, for some schools, accreditation is just not a value or a felt need. There may be a theological reason why a school is not particularly interested in pursuing accreditation. Accreditation for many schools in Latin America doesn't have an economic incentive like it does in the United States. It's not tied to financial aid or government funding in many cases, so there's not a burning need for many schools to be accredited. Another reality is that many Latin American schools, not all, but many, may not have the level of infrastructure, the level of development, the educational academic quality that accreditation standards require.

[7] There's another reason. In some countries government educational policy may be prohibitive. That's the situation in Guatemala, for example. Our seminary SETECA is accredited privately through AETAL (Asociación Evangélica de Educación Teológica en América Latina), but it's not recognized by the government. And there's a constitutional reason that we're not recognized. The constitution of the republic states that only universities that have been duly recognized by the government and duly chartered can grant legally recognized and valid degrees. That, by definition, leaves SETECA out because we're a seminary and not a private university. So our school has struggled over the years with how to become recognized by the government within these particular legal parameters, and many other schools in other countries struggle with similar issues.

[8] And there's another issue that serves as a barrier to accreditation for many schools. That's that sometimes the accreditors standards may be outdated or do not adequately address new models like online education. That's the case for AETAL, the accrediting association that I represent. There's a felt need in AETAL and within other regional associations of ICETE (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) to do a

better job with the accreditation of online education because we realized that many of our schools have online and distance education models that our accreditation standards do not adequately address. So this is a felt need within AETAL and it's one of the felt needs that led me to want to pursue this particular investigation

[9] So just a little bit about the methodology. This dissertation was based on bibliographic research and there's a methodological element that I would like to mention that was important, which is systems thinking. The type of systems thinking advocated by MIT systems scientist Peter Senge, the author of *The Fifth Discipline* and of *Schools that Learn*, has written much about learning organizations. Systems thinking is important to finding the solution that the investigation seeks because it helps us to realize that theological education does not exist in a vacuum. Theological education as it is practiced in each school and each country and each region of Latin America doesn't exist all by itself, but rather forms part of a very complex system. On the one hand, in a narrow sense, the investigation is seeking to accredit online theological education programs in Latin America, but from a systems thinking perspective we realize and we're able to analyze the way that this localized concern has to do with much broader issues like, for example, higher education and theological education in a global, worldwide perspective.

[10] Also, the globalization and the internationalization of high education accreditation models and standards and the way that those models and standards from other parts of the world may be very important and determinative in Latin America. Also, this has to do with worldwide trends and precedents in distance learning and the accreditation of online programs. The way that's happening around the world is important for us in Latin America as we seek to address the same issue. And also, this involves the challenges related to quality assurance in cross-border provision of higher education. All of this has to do with the particular question that the dissertation addresses, which is the accreditation of online theological education programs in Latin America.

[11] So although this was written for a Latin American audience and dealing with a particular Latin American problem, the investigation recognizes that theological education in the region doesn't exist in a vacuum. Instead, it is part of this larger, complex system. And the investigation and the recommendations are enriched by contributions and precedents from three global context that were found to be representative, not exhaustive, but important to the discussion: Latin America, the United States, and the European Higher Education Area. And also the investigation was enriched by pertinent models insights and resources from Asia, from Australia, and from Canada.

[12] So the investigation was structured by a primary objective and a research question that mirrored each other, but both sought to identify what sort of internal and external factors (and we're talking about factors with relation to the program themselves, internal to the programs and factors outside of the programs) would most increase the possibility of Latin American theological distance education programs in attaining private and/or government accreditation. The investigation was also structured by specific objectives and specific

research questions, and I'd like to share those with you and just give you an overview of the areas that were investigated in some of the findings.

[13] So the first specific objective had to do with identifying global precedence in the fields of academic accreditation and distance education, global precedents that are of particular relevance to the search for paths to accreditation for theological distance education programs in Latin America. In keeping with this first objective, the investigation explored the way that higher education accreditation works in these three representative global contexts. First, we looked at the United States and Canada, where the United States Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation exercise different, but complementary roles in the quality assurance of higher education. Also we investigated the European Higher Education Area that unites 48 countries as the result of a process of convergence that began in 1999 and has been implemented over the past 20 years through the Bologna Process. Finally, we looked at the way that accreditation works in Latin America, both regionally and nationally, and examined the influence that quality insurance in other parts of the world have had in Latin America. So the investigation began broadly, but as it goes forward it becomes more focused in the way that each of these elements that are being considered in the broader analysis contribute to the search for ways that Latin American institutions can attain accreditation and government recognition for their online and distance programs.

[14] As I reviewed the literature, what really came to the fore were some of the major challenges that online education presents for accreditors around the world, in each of these global contexts and in countries all around the world. I'm going to mention several challenges just briefly. First, there's the need to adapt to the fact and the reality of online education and all that that implies. All the statistics demonstrate that online education is with us and is here to stay. It is a new reality in global higher education, so accreditors that may have been hesitant in the beginning have had to come to terms with that and address this new reality.

[15] But it is not only legitimate programs that have grown exponentially. There's also been an explosion of diploma mills. And this explosion of fraudulent programs offered online has convinced both private accreditors and government accreditors of the need to regulate. And it's interesting to note that not only is there a proliferation of diploma mills, but there are also a tremendous number of accreditation mills. Each one of these very impressive names that are appearing on your screen are all bogus, phony organizations with very impressive acronyms. And many have names that were chosen to mimic legitimate accrediting organizations, but they are all phony organizations that have been created to certify or to validate quote/unquote phony diplomas. So it's interesting to note there are many accreditation mills, and the ones that I have included are all accreditation mills that supposedly accredit online education. So this is another reason that governments and private accreditors have had to take this issue very seriously. It's interesting and sort of funny to note that anybody can buy an accredited degree online, just as the proud owner of Chester Ludlow demonstrated when his dogs Master of Business Administration diploma

arrived in the mail. That's a true story. The owner sent off for a diploma in his dog's name, and the dog is supposedly a graduate of Rochville University.

[16] But not only is this phenomenon in the secular world, it's sad to note that there is also a market for fake Christian credentials. Not only are there diploma mills that sell ministerial credentials, doctor of theology degrees and whatnot, but there are also a large number of accreditation mills. These are phony organizations that supposedly accredit phony schools. So the American Accrediting Association of Theological Institutions doesn't exist. The Association of Accredited Bible Schools and all of the others that I could have mentioned are all phony. So this underscores the need that accreditors and governments have had to regulate in this area. What is quality in online education? What is quality in distance education? How can we distinguish a quality degree from something that is of lesser quality or something that is of no quality at all?

[17] Another important challenge that online education has presented to higher education accreditation worldwide is the need to contextualize. Accreditors have seen the need to contextualize their traditional values and their standards in the light of new educational realities. Online education has required contextualization because it has brought with it several paradigm shifts, a number of important changes that are in direct conflict with long-held values of accreditors and the assumptions that they have long held about academic quality. Judith Eaton, the President of the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, in 1999 wrote an important paper called "Core Academic Values, Quality, and Regional Accreditation: The Challenge of Distance Learning." This was a time when online education was already here, it was a thing, it was a phenomenon, it was growing, and accreditors were playing catch-up. There was raging debate. Some were very much for this new thing and others were very much against. And in the debate, the question was: Do we need to sacrifice our values our quality our standards to be able to accredit online education? Can online education even be accredited?

[18] This was part of the discussion at that time, so this paper that Dr. Eaton wrote has been programmatic in the move to contextualize traditional values of accreditation in response to the challenges of distance learning. In the paper, she lays out the core values of regional accreditation in the United States: institutional autonomy, collegiality, shared governance, intellectual and academic authority of the faculty, the granting of degrees, a liberal arts education, and site-based and community-based education and learning. And she described the way that online education challenges each one of these traditional values, these traditional assumptions, and in some cases turns it on its ear.

[19] For example, the case of intellectual and academic authority of the faculty, the online education has really changed the role of faculty, in many cases, by disaggregating. What used to be the role of one faculty member now is done, in some cases, by a team. Where in a traditional role the professor would prepare his own course, for online courses, in some cases, there are courseware courses that that are bought and then taught. Or you have a production team where one person is the content expert, and one person is the expert and

pedagogy, and one person is the expert in graphic design and all the different components of what goes into making an online course, and then you have another person who's the tutor who actually teaches the course. So all of this has just brought about tremendous shifts in the way that higher education is done.

[20] Also take, for example, the last one. We've gone from a situation where location is important, being together is important, to study together, and to work together physically in the same place. And online education has changed that in a way that the physical site is less important. For groups of people who learn and who study together and also for people who work together. Eaton concludes in this article that it is indeed possible to accredit or to evaluate quality and online education and to accredit the best of those programs without sacrificing the values of accreditation, but she says it's important to contextualize the traditional values. I'll just read what she said, "Will accommodating distance learning in this manner destroy core academic values? If we are careful to honor the purpose associated with each of these values, we will not destroy them. In each case, as we modify standards to accommodate distance learning we need to ask, 'Are we sustaining the purpose that this core academic value embodies?'"

[21] The final challenge that I want to highlight that online education has made evident and urgent for accreditors around the world is the need to cooperate. The challenges associated with fraudulent, but not only spurious but legitimate online programs, have brought to the fore the need for cross border quality assurance and the need for cooperation among accreditors and across regions. And I'll just mention two ways that accreditors are doing that from the North American context.

[22] The regional accreditors of the different regions of the United States have come together in agreement of a basis of evaluation of online education, and they all use a document that's called the "Inter-Regional Guidelines for Evaluation of Distance Education." And when they talk about distance education, they they're specifically addressing online learning. And this is very important because you have, in the United States, regional accreditors that are responsible for different parts of the United States, and they accredit institutions that are physically present in those different regions of the United States. But distance education and online education crosses those regions, and so what you do with schools there in one part of the United States that are offering their courses and their programs in another part of the states? How do you regulate that? How do you make sure that quality education is being provided? And how do you make sure that what's being offered is not fraudulent?

[23] Well, on the basis of these original guidelines, there's a very important initiative called NCSARA (the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements) and the idea is that if your school is in one of the 50 states of the United States, there is governmental oversight of education for the whole country, but each state has its own oversight, its own Department of Education. And it would just be so difficult and prohibitive if a school in South Carolina, in order to offer distance education or online education in the rest of the 49

states, had to seek permission separately for each state. And so this this platform, NCSARA, is a consortium of schools from all the different states, and they have agreed to adhere to the same basis of quality in online education, which is this document of the inter-regional guidelines.

[24] So regarding the second specific objective, after a broader overview in the first chapters, I began to evaluate the degree and the ways in which the global precedents can serve as guides for the private and the governmental accreditation of theological distance education programs in Latin America. And I'll just highlight some of the things that I began to analyze and see as important. One of the major global precedents that was evaluated with regard to this second specific objective was the European educational reform, the Bologna Process, which led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area. This is a major global precedent that is much bigger than the European Union itself. It involves 48 countries to date, thousands of institutions, and millions of students. And as I began to analyze that, there were five aspects of the European reform that seemed to be particularly relevant to the accreditation of theological distance education in Latin America.

[25] The first thing that was found to be particularly important is that, in the European Higher Education Area, there's a common qualifications framework. All of the countries have a common understanding of what a bachelor's degree is, what a master's degree is, what a doctoral degree is. This is important as we compare the European experience to the Latin American experience. A bachelor's degree in Guatemala and a bachelor's degree in Honduras and a bachelor's degree in Cuba or in Venezuela could be structured very differently. And there was actually a study that compared the higher education system of Latin America by country and across the region and that was demonstrated to be the case.

[26] The second aspect of the European reform that was seen to be particularly important was a competency-based orientation for evaluating learning outcomes and quality. Part of the European reform had to do with coming to a consensus regarding generic competencies and also specific competencies, graduate profiles for each university program. And as different higher education institutions across the European Union and across the European Higher Education Area are working together on the basis of a common framework, they have freedom to have different programs. Each program is unique and has its particular emphasis and focus, but they are all responsible to work towards the same graduate profiles. So, if you have a program that is training architects, the universities may structure their programs differently, but they are trying to form and to demonstrate in their graduates the same professional competencies regarding that particular field. So this is important for distance education because a competency-based orientation isn't necessarily tied to so many hours in classroom, the importance is not necessarily face-to-face instruction, and it's not necessarily how many hours were you in the classroom. What is important is being able to demonstrate the quality and the efficacy of the program on the basis of learning.

[27] Another aspect that was found to be very important is a strong emphasis on cross-border quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. There are common strategies and mechanisms and parameters that are designed to assure that, as these countries in the region work together along common guidelines, they, at least aspire to and are trying to, maintain a common level of quality or at least a minimum level of quality.

[28] Another thing that would seem to be important is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This is relevant to distance education, it's relevant to online education because unlike the traditional Carnegie system that's been very important in the United States, in Latin America and in other places as well, the ECTS is a system of credits that measures academic credit in terms of time invested in learning activities and not seat time. Now, students, as part of their learning activities, may have time in a physical classroom and they may have time of face-to-face instruction, but not necessarily. The ECTS system takes into account all of the learning activities that are involved in achieving the outcomes that have been proposed for the course and for the program.

[29] A fifth reason that the European educational reforms are important for Latin America is because of a study called the Latin American Tuning Project. The Tuning Project, within the context of the European Higher Education Area, is a project that helps the different countries to implement the educational policies that have been agreed upon. So all of the ministers of education come together and make decisions, and then everybody has to go back to their respective countries and figure out, "Well, how do we make this a reality within our educational system?" So the Tuning Project, within the European context, helps to implement the decisions that have been made. But in other countries of the world, the Tuning Project, with the European Union and with local participation of governments and higher education institutions, has sponsored studies in different regions of the world. The idea behind it has been to explore what would be the importance, or the feasibility, the possibility, the value of implementing similar reforms within our region. So in that way there's been a Project Tuning China, where they have explored the possibilities and the value and the feasibility of implementing similar reforms within the Chinese higher education system. There's been a Tuning Africa.

[30] And there have been two phases of the Tuning Project in Latin America, in which representatives of Latin American higher education and representative policy makers of the different Latin American governments, with representation from every country, have explored together with their European counterparts what would it look like if we did something like this in our respective countries of Latin America and in Latin America as a region. The two phases of this study have yielded broad participation. They have yielded voluntary implementation by different universities they have said, "We want to be a part of this." They have yielded emulation of the reforms by some of the governments that have said, "We would like to take the initiative of doing something similar in our national education system."

[31] And the Project Tuning Latin America has also yielded a formal proposal for generic competencies. The idea is there's a consensus that every professional and every university student in Latin America success as a student and success as a professional in today's world requires the students to have these qualities these skills to be able to build from there. So there's a formal proposal for generic competencies and also a formal proposal for degree specific competence profiles for the different university majors. And that that has come out of Project Tuning Latin America. There's also been a proposal that is being voluntarily implemented in different parts of the region of a Latin American version of the European credit system. In this case it's not called the ECTS. It is called CLAR (Credito Latinoamericano la Referencia), the Latin American Reference Credit is what it's called. So we will talk about that a little bit later.

[32] Now from the US context, as we analyzed the importance and the relevance of these different global precedents, the importance of the regional guidelines was evaluated and found to be very important. Something that's significant about this document is that it lays out nine hallmarks of quality in online education. But the interesting thing is that the evidences of quality are the same evidences that you would look for in a traditional model of education. It serves as a precedent and a model for Latin American governments and accreditors, and what I'm pointing out is that it is modality neutral. It looks for the same evidences of quality regardless of the mode of instruction: quality, missions, and purposes, institutional planning and governance, curriculum evaluation, quality of student and academic services.

[33] Now, here again, these standards remain the same, the need to show quality in each of these areas remains the same, but each of these has to be contextualized and rethought completely in the light of distance learning and the light of online education. For example, the quality of student and academic services. How can a school that offers face-to-face instruction, but also offers online instruction, provide the same access to the library? Or the same access to the different departments of the seminary to their online students who may never have the opportunity to be physically at the seminary? If it's a theological school, what will a seminary do for its online students with regards to chaplaincy care or pastoral care or spiritual nurture and development? So all of those things that traditionally have been thought about, where our best ideas and strategies have been focused on how to do this in a residential model, have to be completely rethought and, in some cases reinvented, as schools try to do and extend the same services to their online students.

[34] The third and the fourth objectives had to do with identifying the external and the internal factors that most favored the accreditation of Latin American theological distance education programs. So we're becoming more and more specific. After this broader overview, we are really coming to where the rubber hits the road and identifying what are those factors that are going to be most helpful for Latin American theological institutions that offer online programs and that are going to be most helpful for these schools to achieve accreditation and recognition from their respective governments. So as I analyzed

those and identified and interacted with those, the factors were analyzed and classified in three ways: internal, external and combined.

[35] The internal factors reflects those aspects of an online program that theological institutions can work to improve that directly impact the quality and the accreditability, if that's a word, of their online offerings. It's a way that a school can invest internally to make their programs of an accreditable quality. These would be things like educational philosophy practices, instructional design, evaluation of outcomes and competencies. The external factors are factors that are outside of the direct control of the school, and that includes things like government policy and accreditation standards. They're very important, as schools are, in many cases, bound by those factors. But they're not directly within their control. What sort of government policies would need to be in place? What sort of accreditation standards would need to be in place for online programs to be accredited in Latin America? And combined factors are those that may originate outside of Latin American theological institutions. They are not something that each school has invented for themselves, but they're tools that can be readily applied by these schools to improve the quality of their online programs.

[36] So I'll just give you a quick overview of what those are. First, I will go over the internal factors that favor the accreditation of Latin American theological distance education programs. The first one I looked at was educational philosophy and practices that promote online student learning. And so, in this section, I explored some of the points of contact between the methodology of Paulo Freire, Jane Vella, the andragogical methodology of Malcolm Knowles, and the social constructionist pedagogy that serves as the basis of Moodle. I emphasize the importance of a student-centered dialogue methodology, where there's substantial interaction between the professor and the students in intentional and creative ways.

[37] Another thing that was highlighted as helpful for schools that want to strengthen the quality of their online programs is the backwards design model. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe are known for this, but there are other authors also that have written helpfully about backwards design process where you begin by identifying the learning outcomes. You think about, in this particular course, in this particular program, in this particular degree, what the learning outcomes are. What are the areas of knowledge and skill that we want to see formed in our students and in our graduates? And what are the ways that they should be able to use and apply what they've learned? In theological education it's even more complex because we are thinking holistically about education. We're thinking about areas of spiritual formation and character development. So we have very broad or lofty ideals about what we're trying to achieve through theological education.

[38] Well the second phase would be the evidence of achievement. If our students are really learning in the way that we intend for them to learn, what would be the way to evaluate and to see it? So, after identifying learning outcomes and thinking seriously about evaluation, only then do you begin to plan learning experiences and instruction. This is a

model that can be applied to not only online education or distance education, but to any instruction model. But something that is particularly related to online education that I found to be helpful and recommended is Gilly Salmon's 5 stage model. It's a model that has to do with instructional design for online courses. It's a model that helps instructional designers to think about the way that they're designing learning activities for online students. And it's sort of like a Bloom's taxonomy for online learning, where you are intentionally and creatively helping the students move from lower to higher and deeper levels of learning.

[39] So a second internal factor that I looked at was competency-based assessment as an indicator of learning and of quality. Now I mentioned that in the European educational reform and in other parts of the world, competency-based education is very important. It's not new, but it is fairly new for theological education. Competency-based theological education is fairly new but it's something that's very much being discussed. I've included a link for you here to a report that was produced by ATS (Association of Theological Schools) of different educational models with the participation of theological educators that are involved in these different educational models. These peer groups produced a report where they reflect on and evaluate different aspects of these different educational models with regards to accreditation and with regards to different things.

[40] One of the educational models that was that was explored is competency-based theological education. And here I have reproduced a graph where three programs are being compared. There are three masters level theological education programs that are based on competencies. There's not necessarily any requirement for seat time and there may not be face-to-face instruction with the students. And that forms no part of the evaluation of the quality or the efficacy of the program. What is used to evaluate the program is the actual learning that can be demonstrated with relation to the outcomes that had been proposed. So there's the Deploy Program at Grace Theological Seminary in Indiana, there's the Immerse Program at Northwest Baptist Seminary in Canada, and the Kairos Program at the Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota. You can you can see that each one of these programs is different. They have points of contact, but they also have differences in the methodology and differences in the way that they're structured in their technological platform. But the thing that all three have in common is that all three of these programs have been accredited by ATS. And the Deploy Program and Kairos Program, the two programs in the States, have also achieved regional accreditation.

[41] So these are innovative models that have relevance to the accreditation of distance education in other parts of the world that are already being recognized and accredited by secular and theological accreditors in in the States. So this is from the website of the Immerse Program, and I just mentioned this to show you they're seeking mastery learning. Immerse is based on the principle of mastery learning, a system in which students don't just complete assignments, they live out those assignments in the context of life and ministry, guided by a team of mentors. The students aren't necessarily in a classroom. As a matter of fact, they're not in a classroom. But each student is assigned an academic mentor, a ministerial mentor, and also an institutional mentor. The students worked through a series

of carefully crafted learning experiences, designed to help them accumulate the knowledge, the skills, and the character that are required in pastoral ministry leaders. Now this particular program is of interest to us in Latin America because Northwest Baptist Seminary will now launch a Spanish-language version of Immerse in 2019. It's set to begin in February with a group of students in Colombia.

[42] Now with regards to external factors that favor the accreditation of these types of programs, I looked at cooperative strategies that strengthen the quality of online theological education. And in the dissertation there was a section where we talked about the phenomenon of unbundling and re-bundling higher education and theological education. Now to explain what that means would take more time than we have. But you are aware that, in many aspects of life, it used to be that you could only buy things as a package, and now you can acquire each part separately. I flew back to Guatemala just a few days ago, and it used to be that on the airline you got food, entertainment, peanuts, and all the rest of it. And now, supposedly, the prices are better, but you pay for each specific service that you want to acquire.

[43] Well, the same phenomenon is happening in many areas, and we could give many examples, but there's also examples of unbundling and bundling in higher education. Institutions used to be vertically integrated. Students would typically begin and complete their studies there, and all the aspects of the educational program and the institutional program were done in-house. With the internet and the way that the internet has disrupted many aspects of society and just changed the way we do things, higher education has become unbundled. And you'll hear authors and thinkers and educational futurists who are talking about disruptive innovation. They'll talk about not only the ways that higher education has already been unbundled, but the ways that it will continue to be transformed in the future.

[44] Now with regards to the dissertation, the particular thing that interested me with regards to strengthening online programs in Latin America was to think about ways that we could cooperate together as institutions. Instead of each school by itself trying to reinvent the wheel, what are ways that we could share resources and outsource some services and do things together so that we could strengthen theological education across the board?

[45] The other external factor that I wanted to mention were accreditation policies that are compatible with online education, and the dissertation explores two of those. We've already mentioned those, the ECTS system and the cloud system. The virtue of both of these is that neither one requires seat time, neither one requires face-to-face instruction, and they are both widely recognized by governments because they're part of this major global precedent that we have mentioned. The hallmarks of quality were also found to be very important because they are modality neutral.

[46] The combined factors that I just wanted to mention briefly are benchmarking initiatives to strengthen the quality of online education. The dissertation explores several of those.

Those are tools that have been developed outside of Latin America, outside of our schools. As schools look for ways to strengthen the quality of theological education and theological distance education, these are very valuable. There's the Code Program, Australasian Council on Open Distance and e-Learning, there's e-Excellence, which is a European quality benchmark for online open and flexible education, there's Open Ed, which is a benchmarking best practice this system for MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and also the Online Learning Consortium has some very valuable resources. All of these can be used for free. One more is Pick-and-Mix. It's a benchmarking initiative that's absolutely free on the internet. Schools can take from this different benchmarks that will be helpful and relevant to their particular situation.

[47] So, on the basis of those internal factors that I've mentioned, I wanted to offer some proposals and recommendations to theological schools in Latin America to help them strengthen their online programs. And on the basis of the external factors I wanted to offer proposals and recommendations for the consideration of private accreditors. In particular, I've been thinking about AETAL. There is interest within AETAL and interest within AETAL's accreditation commission for these types of recommendations, and so I addressed some of the recommendations specifically to AETAL. And also to governments, if any government in the region was interested to see or to know more about how online accreditation happens in other parts of the world, some recommendations for them were included.

[48] So, first I will mention recommendations with regards to the first two factors, the educational philosophy and practices and competency-based assessment. I just wanted to urge theological institutions to adapt educational philosophy and practices that are appropriate for online education and I underscored my conviction of the importance of competency-based education. Number two, the recommendation is that AETAL, in their accreditation standards and in their self-evaluation guide for institutions, would really orient their evaluation of program quality around the achievement of learning, not seat time, not other metrics, but learning that can be demonstrated. I mentioned in the third place that I thought it would be good for AETAL and Overseas Council to work together to train member schools in backwards design and in developing competency-based theological education.

[49] I made a couple of recommendations with regards to the first external factor, cooperative strategies that strengthen the quality of online theological education. I won't repeat them here, but the dissertation gives a list, a series of ideas and recommendations of ways that theological schools in the region could work together to strengthen the quality of their programs through cooperation with other schools and also by working through networks of theological schools, like Overseas Council and AETAL. And there's some ideas like the creation of new initiatives but also participation in existing initiatives in ways that, if we weren't so fragmented, if we could come together in some common understandings, we could share resources, programs, services, and other things.

[50] With regards to the second external factor, seeking accreditation policies that would help these programs be accredited, I recommend to AETAL that in our accreditation standards as we work to revise our standards that we would incorporate a definition of academic credit that's compatible with distance education. This would be one that doesn't presuppose a residential or face-to-face, bricks-and-mortar model, but that can be applied to all sorts of instructional models. This definition would require the same level of quality for all models, but models would be able to demonstrate that quality in ways that are appropriate to their particular context. I'm recommending a definition of academic credit that's compatible and easy to relate to other systems like the Clark system or the ECTS system. And one of the recommendations is that AETAL would adopt the Clark system or would at least encourage schools to use both the Clark system and AETAL's own system, but also to translate that into Clark terms.

[51] The second recommendation is that AETAL would adopt a modality neutral, agnostic posture with regards to instructional models. The same level of quality would be required for all schools, regardless of whether it's a distance model or an online model or a traditional model of instruction. Third is that the accreditation standards and the self-evaluation guide would give specific orientation as to how different types of programs can comply with the accreditation standards. How do those standards apply to different modes of instruction?

[52] With regards to the benchmarks, the combined factors that schools can apply to themselves but not that they necessarily had to generate, I drew all these quality assurance tools around the world and I gave a series of recommendations to theological institutions in Latin America, to ICETE, to AETAL, and to Overseas Council. One is that theological education institutions would take advantage of these benchmarking initiatives, that they would see them as strategic tools that help them to promote the development, improvement, and quality control of their online programs and of the academic and student services that are associated.

[53] In second place, I recommended that the strategic networks like AETAL and Overseas Council could cooperate in developing and promoting these benchmarking initiatives for online education. A recommendation for ICETE, to which AETAL belongs, would be that ICETE could participate as a member of the Chia International Quality Group, and that AETAL and the other regions of ICETE could implement and promote these international standards of quality among their schools. Number four, that AETAL's accreditation standards and self-evaluation guide could be revised to include an explicit policy of best practices for online and distance education. And this could be something that is in line with standards that are recognized in other parts of the world with regards to quality and online and distance education. And finally, I recommended that AETAL's standards and self-evaluation guide could apply these criteria to the evaluation and accreditation of programs distance and online theological education, which is something that has not been done until now. And it is the hope that this research and these recommendations could be instrumental in helping that to happen. So there we are.

[54] Jonathan Armstrong: Outstanding presentation.

[55] Paul Branch: Thank you.

[56] Jonathan Armstrong: It'll be our privilege to dialogue with Paul for the remainder of our time. Paul I want to thank you again. That was one of the most polished and expertly prepared research presentation that I've ever seen online, so I'm extremely grateful that you would share that with us. Time will be short because there's so many good ideas to discuss here, so let's narrow in on Paul's specific proposals. I'd like to jump right in. Let's talk about Paul's specific proposals and implementation. How these might actually be concretized? Thank you.

[57] Danny Carroll: Well, I have a question just because of my own experience, are you still wrestling with AETAL in terms of institutional competition and suspicions? You know you talked about cooperation, and that was one of the things that we always hit up with because people were suspicious of outsiders coming in and looking at what an institution was doing, especially if it was an institution in the same country. There was a lot of suspicion. So I'm just curious, you know, for all kinds of historical reasons. Its country specific, denominational specific, and cultural specific. Have you bumped into that?

[58] Paul Branch: Well, you know, in the way that I relate to different schools, I am typically with schools that are willing to engage and cooperate to some degree, because they're part of AETAL or because they're part of Overseas Council's network. But I think that, even among the schools that participate, we really need to continue to grow in that area. And there are other schools that may not participate in those networks just because of that suspicion that you mentioned.

[59] Juan Martínez: This is Juan Martinez. I was also involved, not with AETAL but with ALIET (Asociación Latinoamericana de Instituciones de Educación Teológica) about the same time, in the 1990s, and both the issue of suspicion, but also the issue of questioning the value arose. You know, what was the value that the institution was going to gain? The value of accreditation is for connections outside, but many of the institutions were not seriously connected outside of their own denominational or church networks. They often wondered what the point was. In fact, most of the institutions I continue to interact with today would have the question, "Why would we bother?" How do you address that?

[60] I was very grateful and I found it interesting, but many of these discussions were the same ones and I think Danny already alluded to. They are the same discussion we were having about distance education back before, back when we were looking at manuals and other kinds of things that that we were trying to put together. The issues were much the same kinds of issues, and so I'm wondering how that gets addressed. Now, is the answer just to say we'll stay within the networks of people that are interested, or is there a broader answer than that?

[61] Paul Branch: That's a question that I'm very much asking myself, and I don't have the answer. As we have related with the regional associations of other parts of the world who are also part of ICETE, I've come to realize that AETAL is so far behind with regards to accreditation. If you compare AETAL, with 165 schools but only about three accredited schools, with the Asian Theological Association, where almost all of those schools are accredited, I'm still trying to understand. How do you understand that? Is it a cultural thing? Is it because of the requirement of the Association that their affiliate schools also be accredited? I think there are several parts to that, but it's something that we urgently need to address in Latin America.

[62] Orbelinda Eguizabal: Well, as I was listening to you, I was wondering what the situation is. Even here in the States, there are a lot of institutions offering online programs, but still under the same umbrella of accreditation. I think that is pretty much the case in some institutions in Latin America, with the exception of the programs that are purely online, having, for example, among the other programs, a master's degree online. So the institutions are still not making any distinction in the accreditation piece and they are just putting that online program under the same parameters of the accreditation, whatever the accrediting association is. So did you explore something like that in Latin America and how that could work? Does that mean they would need a different piece of the accreditation for the online programs? Could it be better keep them combined with non-online and online programs and just get one accreditation for everything? I just was wondering about that and I don't know how much you have considered that aspect. I think that is an important aspect for institutions. To get to the point that all their programs are online is going to take a while.

[63] Paul Branch: Well, in the States, you're right. A lot of online programs that are accredited are parts of accredited institutions that are traditional residential type models. With AETAL, the problem is there's not explicit mention of online or distance education, so it really comes down to the way that the accreditation commission interprets the standards because there's nothing explicit there. It comes down to a matter of interpretation. So in the case of SETECA, our school is accredited and we have residential programs, but we also have online programs. And the assumption is that our online programs have been accredited along with the institution. But what about a school like ProMETA. Here's Mark and Keith. Their school is purely online and wouldn't have some of the bricks and mortar aspects that a school like SETECA has, and so I doubt really that AETAL's accreditation standards as written now would be able to adequately address a school that is virtualized to the extent that ProMETA is. Part of the proposal is that we need to make those things explicit. Even if there's goodwill and the good intention to take into account these types of programs, we need to show how different models can fulfill and comply with the standard.

[64] Danny Carroll: If I can jump in here with a little history, the idea of the online really was an issue from the very beginning. So that was a discussion that went on twenty years, and Juan Martinez would know this, but the thing was that no one knew what to do with it. And

so everyone that was working on the standards was the traditional teacher and the traditional institution. Everyone was aware of these other issues that were just beginning to surface, but no one really knew how to do it. And so what actually happened, and you actually are the fruit of this, is that for twenty years the question was to ask who was going to be able to have the time to sit down and do what you've just done. And at the time, no one had the time. And so that's why that was never addressed.

[65] The other thing that was a topic of discussion is the question, "What is it that's accredited, the school or the degree?" And, you know, when I was at Denver, for instance, that was discussion. So Denver was giving accredited degrees, but before they could even offer anything online, they would have to run the degree program through the ATS process. And ATS had some standards linked, in terms of how much of a degree could be online, library resources available through internet, and things like that. So that's the interesting discussion. What is it that's accredited, the degree or the institution? How do those combine? So, you just gave the example of SETECA, and SETECA may be an accredited institution. The other question is, "Is it an accredited degree within the accredited institution?"

[66] Paul Branch: That's the difference, for example, that I could note between AETAL and, say, the Asian Theological Association. They accredit institutions and programs. And that's one of the reasons why there's so many institutions and programs that have achieved accreditation. One thing that is being done right now within AETAL is that we're trying to go back and rework, revise, and rethink some of the accreditation standards and processes. We are doing some of the same work that you guys did twenty years ago, just realizing that some of the good decisions that were made twenty years ago are still in place and should be and there's other things that need to be rethought and contextualized. And our schools are asking for that. And you're right about that sense that there's a debt to our schools and it's something that has gone unfulfilled for a while. So we hope to be able to do that.

[67] Rick Weymouth: I'm going to jump in on this one. One of the reasons that we would talk about accreditation was that some of these schools would want to send their students on for higher degrees outside of Latin America. We had to come up with some kind of standards that would be acceptable in the US and Europe. So, when you're talking about learning internationally, and this goes to the US Department of Education other things like that, the question was how to set up a degree that would be recognized by, let's say, doctoral programs in the US and in Europe. That was something that was important and which is an ongoing issue. Now, here at Wheaton, if a student from overseas applies for the doctoral program and all their learning has been in Africa or Latin America, the question is, you know, "How good was that degree?" Juan, you do this with Fuller, I know you do.

[68] Juan Martínez: Yeah. And part of the question, we do it at Fuller and also now others in the United States are with Spanish-Language Bible Institutes, which are probably the closest to a lot of the kinds of programs that we're talking about Latin America. As long as they're only serving internally, the issues of accreditation aren't issues. But the moment a group of

students want to go out beyond, like Danny mentioned. And certainly these Bible institutes are working with ATS to figure out a way, not to accredit the Bible Institutes, but to recognize the value of the work that they have done, so that ATS institutions would know that a diploma from XYZ Bible Institute would be equivalent academically and capacity-wise to enter a master's program at this point. So that becomes another way if the issue is working with other institutions. Those are some of the other ways that are being used to answer that.

[69] I think the question continues to be, "What's the value of accreditation for a specific institution, for the students that value that?" I think that the value of having a common base is important, you know. In other words if you did this here and you did this there, there's some commonality, there's some academic oomph to what you've done. But the issue is how to connect to other places. That one hasn't been resolved. And I'm not sure how it gets resolved in the Spanish-speaking world. I think in the Portuguese-speaking world, or Brazil, ATEAL has so many institutions. But it still finds it hard to have institutions in the Spanish-speaking world that are actively working. I think that's because, with the other accrediting agencies, Brazil's is very strong and the Spanish-speaking world is all over the place.

[70] Paul Branch: That's right. And in Latin America, we have that fragmentation between Brazil and the Spanish-speaking countries, and then the fragmentation among the Spanish-speaking countries.

[71] Otto Kladosky: Jonathan, may ask a question that is not in the line of your original question?

[72] Jonathan Armstrong: Absolutely. Go ahead, please.

[73] Otto Kladosky: Thank you. Paul, first of all, thank you so very much. Your work is outstanding this is superduper-califragilistic, and I really appreciate it. Can we distribute, or how much can we distribute your thesis and your presentation. I think many organizations need to hear this. I represent Trainers of Pastors International Coalition, and most of the organizations that I would represent are non-accredited. They would be very interested in hearing this, nevertheless, in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and other places. I've been in connection with organizations that intend to be accredited or accredited as SETECA is, not by the government, but by the standards. So, how much can we share? How can we share it? Similarly with some of the graphs that you have. I saw the copyright of your thesis. I imagine that we can go back to some of the sources, like Marvin Oxenham and other graphs that you presented. They are very useful, so back to you.

[74] Paul Branch: You can feel free to distribute that or use it in any way that would be helpful, that's fine. I wrote it intending it to be helpful in our region, and any way that you would find it to be helpful among the schools you represent, feel free to share.

[75] Otto Kladensky: So copyright means I have the right to copy it as many times as I need, right?

[76] Danny Carroll: In Latin America, yes.

[77] Otto Kladensky: Yeah. It's in Spanish. I hope you put some of the stuff in English.

[78] Paul Branch: Yeah, there may be some parts that I may publish later, but anyway that you're able to use it, please feel free.

[79] Otto Kladensky: Thank you Paul, I have sixteen witnesses, all right.

[80] David Ramirez: Do you think that in Latin America the value of private accreditation is decreasing and there's more expectation for our students to have a government accreditation? It seems to be that there is an interest, and this is a tremendous challenge for all of our nations in Latin America. How difficult has it been to be accredited or recognized by the government?

[81] Paul Branch: David it's nice to meet you and speak to you in person. I've seen your picture, but it's nice to see you and meet you in person. You know that this is a major issue in Latin America for many of our schools, and more than half of AETAL's affiliate schools are in Brazil. Government recognition is the felt need and is the urgent requirement. Brazil is one of the best examples of that. Just a few years ago the Ministry of Education rolled out national curricular guidelines, as they had done with other university programs. But they rolled out national curricular guidelines for theology and the effect of that is that only schools that comply with the competency profiles and with the way that the government says that theology programs should be structured are allowed or permitted by the government to offer, say, a Bachelor of Theology degree. So you have this major problem in this major debate in Brazil because you have hundreds and hundreds of theological schools that are either unable or unwilling to pursue that government accreditation but are legally required to do so. And because the government has regulated theology degrees, all of a sudden Bible schools don't have permission to teach what they teach.

[82] And so that's one of the areas that AETAL is seeing the need to not only promote and offer private accreditation services to our schools, but also to help schools in Brazil and schools in Colombia and other parts of Latin America where government accreditation is necessary and required. We need to give them guidance and help as they navigate that process that many times can be complicated. How do you comply with the government without changing the DNA of your school and becoming something that you never intended to become? In Brazil there's some very good examples of schools that have been able to comply with the government requirement and those best examples should be shared with other schools who are trying to figure out how to do this. David I think I would agree with your observation. For many schools private accreditation continues to have a value, but it's not urgent. The urgency is to be able to achieve government recognition and accreditation.

[83] Jonathan Armstrong: This has been an outstanding conversation, and I just want to let us know we're probably in the last moments of our time. Could I ask, folks, to try to make an exercise of summarizing the most salient, actionable points? So, thank you for an outstanding presentation. Now, how do we respond to this and implement this? What's the low-hanging fruit?

[84] Danny Carroll: Well I would just commend you. This is the study ATEAL has been wanting for 25 years. And you did a superb job. You hit so many things: the history, the international piece. I'm thoroughly impressed. You know what would be interesting? And maybe you've already done this because you're at SETECA and SETECA has some international connections up in the US. It might be interesting to talk with people up in this country and even Wilmer Ramirez at Denver about what's going on. And maybe just spend a couple of days at a couple of different institutions, and maybe you've already done that.

[85] Paul Branch: I would welcome that opportunity.

[86] Danny Carroll: I think that would be great, and you have the connections. You know Wilmer, and you know Juan in LA and others. So that would be something that might give it some extra oomph, so that's just a thought.

[87] Paul Branch: Okay, thank you Dan.

[88] Keith Anderson: Now thank you, Paul, for the presentation and I agree with what my colleagues have said about it, and I am looking forward to seeing how this unpacks in the years ahead. It's going to be a fairly long process. I think one of the takeaways is an encouragement to those of us who are leading institutions or who have a decision-making influence in the institution to look for ways to join together and cooperate, where we can, to help each other fill in gaps. And maybe we can look for ways to strengthen one another's programs through a consortium or through consortiums or through networks, which is one of the purposes of the Aqueduct Project in its mission. And so, I think that's an area where online education for a number of years has not been viewed the same way it is today. And it has a different a different status now than it did twenty years ago. It's time for us to think cooperatively in terms of consortiums, in terms of partnerships and alliances, to see what we can do to help one another develop a network that is accreditable. Maybe it will not be officially accreditable, but at the standard of accreditation where we can work together and maintain a high level of quality as we work in these kinds of partnerships. So for me that's one very important takeaway.

[89] Paul Branch: Thank You

[90] Rick Weymouth: Thanks so much Paul. It's something awesome and I just wanted to pick up on one point that you put in your final chapter on the conclusions and recommendations. And I fully agree with you and want to see an accreditation model with a

concern for having an integrated orientation model that involves being, knowing, and doing what we regard as holistic formation. One that includes not only growth in knowledge, understanding, and the ability to communicate, but also growth and spiritual formation, character growth, and growth in ministry or practical skills.

[91] And here's a great opportunity I believe that can bridge a major divide that we have in our theological education world, and that is the divide between the seminary and the church. With online education you can have two different modes if you like: a blended model, one that involves some face-to-face time and some online time, and then you can have fully online education where, as far as the students are concerned, everything is a hundred percent online with respect to the school. But for those schools, how do they do the holistic formation? I think there's a great opportunity here, and I'd like to see this built into accreditation standards, such as in AETAL's and other international agencies' standards. The push is, if you like, for a partnership between the seminary and the local church because these aspects of the holistic formation can take place through the local church relationships and local church mentors. Not only local church, but it could be local organizations or community organizations where the on-the-ground mentoring can take place. But I think there's a great opportunity here for the accreditation agencies to push for this partnership, particularly as more and more programs go online. And then, as they go online, they want to attract students who are in geographically diverse places. You've got to then develop some intentionally, and you say this. But the key question is, "How do you encouraged people?" We've got to think through this issue. That was the main point I wanted to make, but thank you so much Paul.

[92] Paul Branch: Thank you.

[93] Orbelina Eguizabal: You have great implications and recommendations, but you also have a 420 pages dissertation, so I would say by hearing all the really helpful content and information that you have, it could be really helpful doing two things. One is trying to write a couple of articles that you could get published in a journal like *Kairos*, which is distributed to so many institutions. But also having those articles available for people who are not subscribed to *Kairos* because you could send those articles to people and get conversations started. And I think that could open a great opportunity to discuss all this great work that you have done, and that could be helpful to many institutions in Latin America and outside Latin America in similar contexts that are working on those aspects and still figuring out how to do this. So that could be one thing that I would encourage you to do.

[94] And the other thing is what happens sometimes with dissertation work and with these conversations is that we have great ideas, great suggestions come out of these gatherings, but then you don't see much happening after that. I would say, if you can target one or two things you want to start, I think that could start to help moving toward things that we want to do and see, not only from the accrediting associations but also from institutions and what they can start to do regarding those aspects of online education. Even though we are late on coming with all this online education, there are still institutions that are just starting

to do that and need a lot of orientation on those aspects. So, where do you want to start and when do you want to start? Those could be things that I think are helpful to all of us when we propose these great recommendations and possible ways of work and cooperation. But thank you so much, it's a really nice piece of work that you have done.

[95] Paul Branch: Thank you.

[96] Jonathan Armstrong: Wonderful. Go ahead and unmute yourselves. We're going to thank Paul Branch again for his outstanding work. I want to say thank you so much for your expertise and your time. Thank you, Paul, for leading us in a presentation.

[97] Paul Branch: Thank you for your time, friends. It's good to be able to be a part of this together with you.

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