Panel
Assessment and Accreditation

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PANEL SUMMARY
This panel will feature four speakers with an in-depth knowledge of accreditation and continuous improvement. It will be used both to inform the audience of some of the changes that are likely to occur in IT accreditation criteria in the near future and to seek feedback on specific accreditation-related questions.

Categories & Subject Descriptors: K.3.2.
[Computer and Information Science Education]: Accreditation

General Terms: Documentation, Legal Aspects
Since its inception, SIGITE has actively pursued accreditation for Bachelor’s degree programs in Information Technology. SIGITE’s efforts in this area led to the development of accreditation criteria by CSAB, Inc. at around 2003 with first visits by the Computing Accreditation Commission of ABET a few years later. Since then 16 IT programs have been accredited by ABET CAC. Since the initial acceptance of the accreditation criteria, ABET has made a number of changes to the criteria, the most recent of which are driven by a desire to harmonize the criteria between the different ABET commissions. One of the topics that this panel will cover is the consequences the harmonization efforts may have for IT programs. The panel will address the collaborative processes CAC and CSAB use to develop and revise criteria; to recruit, train, and develop program evaluators and commissioners (team chairs); and to build an accreditation visit team. Accreditation criteria are not static and ABET is currently considering a number of changes to the criteria. The panel will also seek feedback from the audience on the following questions:

1. Under the current criteria, programs “must have published program educational objectives that are consistent with the mission of the institution, [and] the needs of the program’s various constituencies,” where PEOs are defined as “broad statements that describe what graduates are expected to attain within a few years of graduation.” Programs are also required to have processes in place to periodically review and revise their PEOs and to assess and evaluate the extent to which PEOs are being attained. Evaluations of programs in computing and in other disciplines have found that many institutions have struggled with the formulation and assessment of PEOs. ABET has therefore initiated a discussion on PEOs and their role in program evaluation. The panel will share some of the arguments that are relevant to this ongoing discussion and seek feedback from the audience.

2. Unlike the other computing disciplines (computer science, and information systems), the IT criteria provide no additional guidance to programs on mathematics and instead rely on the clause in the general criteria for computing that state that “the program must include mathematics appropriate to the discipline beyond the pre-calculus level.” A question that has frequently arisen is the extent to which this is appropriate and whether the IT criteria need to become more explicit about the required mathematics.

3. The intent of accreditation is to help institutions and their stakeholders achieve high quality, continuously improving programs. The panel will discuss and invite feedback on changing the accreditation visit from an occasional high-stress, high effort, high-cost experience into a continuous improvement process which is part of normal operating procedure.

Since ongoing assessment and continuous improvement are important aspects of accreditation, the panel will discuss different assessment strategies. One of the assessment instruments that is sometimes used in the sister discipline of Information System is a nationally normed exit exam. The panel will discuss the pros and cons of this particular assessment instrument, and seek feedback from the audience on whether SIGITE should commit resources to developing an IT exit examination, similar to the exit exam that is in place for programs in Information Systems.