
Institutional Compliance with ACSCU-ACI Research Standards for Continuous Research Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

*This study assessed Aldersgate College, Inc. (ACI) 's institutional compliance with the Research Standards of the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Council, Inc. (ACSCU-ACI) as a basis for developing a Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF). Employing a descriptive-evaluative research design, the study used purposive sampling to select 20 administrators and faculty members directly engaged in institutional research management and implementation. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire based on the ACSCU-ACI Research Accreditation Instrument and were supplemented by documentary analysis. Descriptive statistics, including weighted mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the level of institutional compliance, while thematic analysis was employed to identify institutional gaps and priority areas for improvement. Findings revealed that Aldersgate College attained an overall compliance rating of **Highly Compliant** ($M = 3.659$, $SD = 0.556$), indicating substantial alignment with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards. Among the seven research dimensions, **Research Agenda and Policies** obtained the highest compliance rating ($M = 3.833$), while **Faculty Research Productivity** registered the lowest mean score ($M = 3.256$), although it remained within the **Compliant** category. Thematic analysis identified five major institutional gaps requiring strategic intervention: (1) research support infrastructure; (2) faculty research capacity and training; (3) research publication and dissemination; (4) research funding and resources; and (5) research policy standardization and research culture. The findings demonstrate that ACI has established a solid institutional foundation for research quality assurance and highlight critical areas requiring sustained organizational investment to strengthen research capability, scholarly productivity, governance, and resource support. Based on these findings, the study proposes a **Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF)** that offers a systematic, evidence-based roadmap for enhancing institutional research quality, sustaining accreditation compliance, and fostering a culture of research excellence in higher education institutions.*

Keywords: research quality assurance; institutional compliance; ACSCU-ACI; continuous research quality improvement; research governance.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) operate in an increasingly competitive and knowledge-driven environment where excellence is measured not only by instructional effectiveness but also by research productivity, innovation, community engagement, and institutional governance. As governments, industries, and society demand greater accountability and transparency, quality assurance has become a central strategy for ensuring that HEIs consistently achieve their educational mission while responding to national and global development priorities. Contemporary quality assurance systems have consequently evolved from compliance-oriented evaluation mechanisms into strategic instruments for institutional learning, organizational transformation, and continuous quality improvement. Recent systematic reviews emphasize that effective quality assurance is characterized by strong institutional leadership, stakeholder engagement, evidence-based decision-making, and the integration of assessment results into strategic planning and governance.

In the Philippine higher education system, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) establishes the minimum standards for academic programs, while voluntary accrediting agencies complement these regulatory functions by evaluating institutional quality beyond minimum compliance. Among these agencies, the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Council, Inc. (ACSCU-ACI) assesses institutional performance across instruction, research, extension, governance, student services, and support systems. Research has become one of the most significant dimensions of accreditation because it demonstrates an institution's capacity to generate knowledge, address societal challenges, strengthen instruction, and contribute to national development through scholarly productivity and innovation.

Recent international scholarship indicates that institutions achieving sustainable accreditation outcomes are those that embed internal quality assurance within their organizational culture rather than treating accreditation as a periodic compliance exercise. Pham et al. (2022), in their investigation of internal quality assurance systems in higher education, found that although many institutions have established the structural components of quality assurance, assessment results are often insufficiently utilized to drive continuous institutional improvement. Their findings highlight the need for quality assurance systems that move beyond documentation and become integral components of institutional planning, monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making. Similarly, contemporary studies argue that mature quality assurance systems promote organizational learning, adaptive governance, and institutional resilience by integrating evidence-based feedback into continuous improvement processes.

Recent analyses demonstrate that institutions achieving sustained accreditation success cultivate quality cultures characterized by shared responsibility, collaborative leadership, systematic monitoring, and continuous organizational learning. Rather than merely satisfying prescribed standards, successful institutions utilize accreditation findings to strengthen academic governance, improve research performance, optimize resource allocation, and enhance institutional effectiveness. This developmental perspective reinforces the view that accreditation functions most effectively when integrated into long-term institutional quality management rather than implemented solely in preparation for accreditation visits.

Research quality remains one of the most challenging areas of higher education quality assurance. Despite increasing institutional investments in research development, many HEIs continue to experience limited publication productivity, inadequate research funding, insufficient mentoring systems, fragmented research governance, and uneven faculty research engagement. Recent literature consistently identifies research leadership,

institutional support mechanisms, faculty capability development, funding opportunities, collaborative research networks, and publication support as significant determinants of sustainable research productivity. These findings suggest that institutional research performance depends not only on individual faculty competence but also on the effectiveness of organizational systems that support research planning, implementation, dissemination, and utilization.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) has consequently emerged as a dominant paradigm in higher education quality management. Unlike traditional quality assurance approaches that emphasize periodic evaluation, CQI promotes an ongoing cycle of planning, implementation, assessment, feedback, and organizational learning. Institutions implementing comprehensive CQI systems demonstrate greater capacity to respond to changing accreditation requirements, improve organizational performance, strengthen faculty engagement, and sustain quality initiatives over time. Recent studies further emphasize that quality improvement becomes sustainable only when institutional leaders systematically translate assessment findings into strategic interventions, resource allocation, faculty development initiatives, and policy enhancement.

Aldersgate College, Inc. (ACI) has consistently pursued institutional excellence through its commitment to research, innovation, and quality assurance. The College has implemented research policies, faculty capability-building programs, research dissemination initiatives, and institutional partnerships to strengthen its research function and support accreditation requirements. Nevertheless, preliminary institutional assessments have revealed variations in compliance with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards, particularly in areas related to faculty research productivity, research funding, publication, governance, and institutional support systems. These observations indicate the need for a comprehensive assessment that will provide empirical evidence on the institution's current level of compliance and identify priority areas requiring strategic improvement.

Although a substantial body of literature has examined accreditation, quality assurance, research productivity, and continuous quality improvement in higher education, relatively few empirical studies have specifically investigated institutional compliance with the Research Standards of the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Council, Inc. (ACSCU-ACI), particularly within Philippine private higher education institutions. Existing studies have largely focused on institutional accreditation outcomes in general or on teaching and learning quality without examining research standards as a distinct dimension of accreditation. Moreover, limited research has translated institutional compliance assessments into evidence-based quality improvement frameworks that can guide strategic research development and long-term accreditation readiness.

To address these gaps, the present study assessed the level of institutional compliance of Aldersgate College, Inc. with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards across key dimensions of research governance and implementation. Specifically, it evaluated compliance with research agenda and policies, faculty research productivity, research funding and grants, research ethics and integrity, research dissemination and publication, intellectual property and innovation, and community-based research engagement. Based on the empirical findings, the study developed a **Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF)** to provide a systematic, evidence-based roadmap for strengthening institutional research governance, enhancing faculty research capability, improving scholarly productivity, and sustaining accreditation readiness. The proposed framework is intended not only to support Aldersgate College's continuous quality improvement initiatives but also to serve as a practical

reference for other Philippine higher education institutions seeking to strengthen research quality assurance and institutional excellence.

METHODS

This study employed a **descriptive-evaluative research design** to assess the extent of institutional compliance with the Research Standards prescribed by the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Council, Inc. (ACSCU-ACI). The descriptive component was used to determine the current level of compliance with the various research standards, while the evaluative component provided a systematic assessment of institutional strengths, deficiencies, and areas requiring continuous quality improvement. This design was deemed appropriate because it facilitates the objective assessment of existing institutional conditions without manipulating variables and generates evidence that can inform organizational planning and policy development.

The respondents consisted of (**n = 20**) administrators and faculty members of Aldersgate College, Inc. who were directly involved in institutional research management, implementation, and quality assurance activities. Purposive sampling was employed.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire adapted from the **ACSCU-ACI Accreditation Instrument** and its corresponding Self-Survey Forms for the Research Area using a four-point compliance scale: 4-highly compliant, 3-compliant, 2-partially compliant and 1-non-compliant. . The instrument was designed to measure institutional compliance across the major indicators of the ACSCU-ACI research standards, including: Research Agenda and Policies; Faculty Research Productivity; Research Funding and Grants; Research Ethics and Integrity; Research Dissemination and Publication; Intellectual Property and Innovation; and Community-Based Research Engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Level of Compliance with ACSCU-ACI Research Standards

Table 1

Level of Compliance with ACSCU-ACI Research Standards

Indicator	Mean	SD	Level of Compliance
Research Agenda and Policies	3.833	0.571	Highly Compliant
Faculty Research Productivity	3.256	0.741	Compliant
Research Funding and Grants	3.789	0.698	Highly Compliant
Research Ethics and Integrity	3.800	0.654	Highly Compliant
Research Dissemination and Publication	3.614	0.632	Highly Compliant
Intellectual Property and Innovation	3.594	0.703	Highly Compliant
Community-Based Research Engagement	3.722	0.666	Highly Compliant
Overall Level of Compliance	3.659	0.556	Highly Compliant

Legend. Non-Compliant (1.00-1.49); Partially Compliant (1.50-2.49); Compliant (2.50-3.49); Highly Compliant (3.50-4.00)

Table 1 shows that the overall level of compliance of Aldersgate College with ACSCU-ACI Research Standards was rated Highly Compliant with a composite mean of 3.659 (SD = 0.556). Among the seven indicators, Research Agenda and Policies obtained the highest mean score of 3.833 (SD = 0.571), also rated Highly Compliant, while Faculty Research Productivity recorded the lowest mean of 3.256 (SD = 0.741), which falls within the Compliant range, the only indicator that did not reach the Highly Compliant threshold.

These findings align with Bernardo et al. (2022), who found that Philippine higher education institutions accredited by recognized accrediting bodies tend to demonstrate stronger research agenda alignment and policy formalization than their non-accredited counterparts, though publication productivity among faculty remains a persistent challenge. Similarly, Tus et al. (2021) documented that faculty research participation in Philippine private HEIs is frequently impeded by workload demands and insufficient institutional training, particularly in quantitative methods, which is consistent with the comparatively lower score observed in Faculty Research Productivity in this study.

These imply that while Aldersgate College has established strong foundational research structures evidenced by Highly Compliant ratings across six of seven indicators sustained and deliberate attention to Faculty Research Productivity is necessary to achieve full compliance across all research dimensions required by ACSCU-ACI. The disparity between policy-level compliance and output-level compliance suggests that institutional research culture and individual faculty capacity must be developed in tandem with existing structural supports.

Section 2. Gaps that Exist Between Aldersgate College's Current Research Practices and ACSCU-ACI Standards

Theme 1: Research Support Infrastructure

Table 2

Thematic Matrix of Research Support Infrastructure: Strengths, Gaps, and Recommendations

Strengths	Gaps vs. ACSCU-ACI Standards	Recommendations
• Dedicated research office assists and guides faculty • Supportive administration and available basic facilities • Institutionalized community-oriented research programs • Opportunities for research presentation and publication	• Research manual not yet materialized/operationalized • No monitoring and evaluation system for research outputs • Governance structure insufficient for ACSCU-ACI compliance	• Establish a clear research governance structure properly communicated to stakeholders • Finalize and officially adopt the research manual • Implement a formal monitoring and evaluation framework for all research activities

Table 2 presents the thematic matrix for Theme 1: *Research Support Infrastructure*, displaying the identified institutional strengths, existing gaps relative to ACSCU-ACI standards, and corresponding recommendations derived from the qualitative data of respondents.

The data indicate that the institution has established a research and creative work office tasked with guiding and assisting faculty and students in research activities. Respondents affirmed the presence of clear research policies and standards, supportive administration, and available basic research facilities alongside opportunities for presenting and publishing research outputs. The institution's community-oriented programs, including rural enterprise and livelihood projects, reflect a coherent thematic focus.

However, a recurring concern among respondents is the absence of a clearly delineated governance hierarchy for research. More critically, the research manual, which should serve as the normative reference document for all research policies and procedures, has not yet been finalized and operationalized. Without this foundational document, research activities are governed by informal norms rather than enforceable institutional standards, a condition inconsistent with ACSCU-ACI requirements.

Theme 2: Faculty Research Capacity and Training

Table 3

Thematic Matrix of Faculty Research Capacity and Training: Strengths, Gaps, and Recommendations

Strengths	Gaps vs. ACSCU-ACI Standards	Recommendations
• Faculty participation in research is actively encouraged • Recent Research Festival demonstrates institutional engagement • Competence in educational innovation, applied technology, and community development	• Limited training in advanced research methods and statistical analysis • Insufficient incentive structures for sustained faculty research • Low awareness of ACSCU-ACI research standards among faculty	• Conduct regular research training and workshops on advanced methods and statistical tools • Designate or hire a resident statistician for faculty and student support • Develop faculty incentive and recognition programs to sustain research engagement • Integrate ACSCU-ACI standards orientation into annual faculty development

Table 3 presents the thematic matrix for Theme 2: *Faculty Research Capacity and Training*, summarizing the strengths, compliance gaps, and actionable recommendations identified through thematic analysis of respondents' qualitative inputs.

Faculty research capacity emerged as the most consistently cited area of concern across all data sets. While respondents acknowledged that faculty participation in research is encouraged and that the institution recently organized a Research Festival, encouragement does not equate to competence at the level required by ACSCU-ACI.

Regular, institutionalized training programs that address both technical research skills and accreditation awareness are thus imperative.

Theme 3: Research Publication and Dissemination

Table 4

Thematic Matrix of Research Publication and Dissemination: Strengths, Gaps, and Recommendations

Strengths	Gaps vs. ACSCU-ACI Standards	Recommendations
• Opportunities for research presentation exist • Practical, community-oriented outputs reflect local relevance • Participation in research activities is encouraged institutionally	• Very limited peer-reviewed journal publication output • Near-zero international research visibility • No streamlined digital documentation and archiving system	• Set annual publication targets for peer-reviewed journals per department • Digitize and streamline research documentation and submission processes • Provide faculty access to journal databases and publication support services • Establish institutional repository for research outputs

Table 4 presents the thematic matrix for Theme 3: *Research Publication and Dissemination*, illustrating findings on institutional strengths, compliance gaps, and recommendations in relation to ACSCU-ACI publication and dissemination standards.

Publication output is among the most quantifiable indicators in any accreditation framework, and it is precisely in this dimension that Aldersgate College Inc. faces its most pressing compliance challenge. Respondents consistently noted that peer-reviewed publications are limited, international research visibility is virtually absent, and access to publication avenues is constrained.

*Theme 4: Research Funding, Resources, and Facilities***Table 5***Thematic Matrix of Research Funding, Resources, and Facilities: Strengths, Gaps, and Recommendations*

Strengths	Gaps vs. ACSCU-ACI Standards	Recommendations
• Basic research facilities available for faculty • Partnerships with national research organizations established • Institutional focus on research and development is stated	• Insufficient funding for large-scale research projects • Limited access to advanced facilities, laboratories, and equipment • No structured internal grants or competitive research funding mechanism • Limited access to research databases and academic resources	• Establish an internal research grants program with transparent criteria • Upgrade laboratory and research equipment to support diverse study designs • Leverage national partnerships for resource-sharing and co-funding arrangements • Provide institutional subscriptions to academic journal databases

Table 5 presents the thematic matrix for Theme 4: *Research Funding, Resources, and Facilities*, capturing the resource-related strengths, gaps in compliance with ACSCU-ACI standards, and corresponding institutional recommendations drawn from respondents' qualitative responses.

Institutional research capacity is inherently bounded by the resources made available for it. Respondents identified limited funding and inadequate research facilities and equipment as persistent barriers. While ACI has established national research partnerships and possesses basic facilities, these have not been sufficient to support research at the scale and rigor expected by ACSCU-ACI.

The absence of a structured, competitive internal grants program means that faculty who wish to undertake more ambitious, large-scale studies have no institutional funding pathway. This forces research production to remain within the modest scope of small, community-based projects valuable in their own right, but insufficient to demonstrate the research productivity profile that ACSCU-ACI accreditation requires.

Theme 5: Research Policy Standardization and Culture

Table 6

Thematic Matrix of Research Policy Standardization and Culture: Strengths, Gaps, and Recommendations

Strengths	Gaps vs. ACSCU-ACI Standards	Recommendations
- Research policies and standards are reportedly in place - Community-oriented and livelihood research programs established - Collaborative practices exist within community programs	- Non-uniform application of research policy across departments - Low faculty awareness of ACSCU-ACI research standards - Insufficient culture of active research collaboration and participation - Research participation is individual rather than institutionally embedded	- Enforce uniform research policy implementation across all academic units - Conduct institution-wide orientation on ACSCU-ACI research standards - Incentivize collaborative and interdisciplinary research projects - Include research engagement as a criterion in faculty evaluation systems

Table 6 presents the thematic matrix for Theme 5: *Research Policy Standardization and Culture*, outlining the policy-related strengths, gaps versus ACSCU-ACI standards, and strategic recommendations derived from the thematic analysis of faculty and administrator responses.

Theme E addresses the coherence and culture within which research is conducted at the college. While respondents acknowledged the existence of research policies and standards, there was consistent reference to non-uniform application across academic units. The call for a "uniform research policy" and "informed policy" appeared in multiple responses, suggesting that existing policies are not consistently understood, communicated, or enforced across departments.

Underlying this policy fragmentation is a broader cultural issue: research is not yet universally experienced by faculty as a shared professional obligation embedded in institutional identity. Respondents recommended fostering "a culture of active collaboration and participation in research initiatives" a recommendation that implies the current culture falls short of this ideal. Culture cannot be mandated; it must be cultivated through visible leadership, peer recognition, collaborative structures, and consistent standards applied equitably across all units.

Overall Gap Assessment Summary**Table 7.** *Overall Gap Assessment Summary*

	Theme	Gap Severity	Priority Action
TA	Research Support Infrastructure	Moderate	Formalize governance structure; adopt research manual; implement Monitoring and Evaluation
TB	Faculty Research Capacity and Training	High	Regular advanced research training; capacitate statisticians; awareness of ACSCU-ACI standards
TC	Research Publication and Dissemination	High	Set publication targets; digitize documentation; provide database access
TD	Research Funding, Resources, and Facilities	High	Establish internal grants; upgrade facilities; leverage national partnerships
TE	Research Policy Standardization and Culture	Moderate	Enforce uniform policy; institution-wide standards orientation; incentivize collaboration

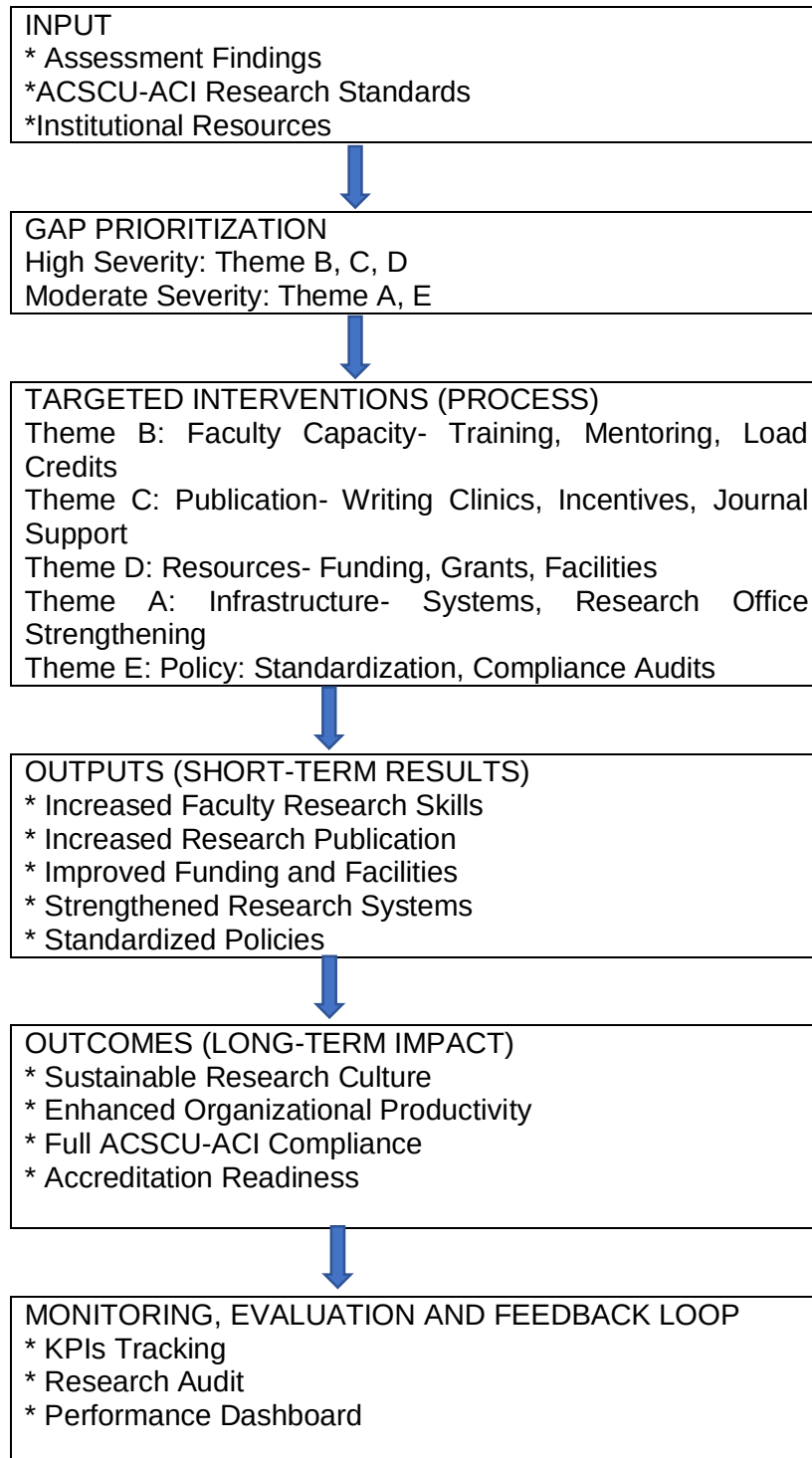
Table 7 synthesizes the five identified themes, their corresponding gap severity, and priority action areas to guide institutional planning for ACSCU-ACI compliance. As shown from the table, among the five identified themes, three were rated with High gap severity: Faculty Research Capacity and Training (Theme B), Research Publication and Dissemination (Theme C), and Research Funding, Resources, and Facilities (Theme D); while Research Support Infrastructure (Theme A) and Research Policy Standardization and Culture (Theme E) were assessed at Moderate gap severity. No theme received a Low gap severity rating, indicating that compliance gaps are present across all dimensions of ACSCU-ACI research standards.

These findings align with the observations of Gonzales and Ching (2020), who found that research compliance gaps in Philippine private HEIs are most pronounced in publication productivity and resource allocation, while policy-level structures tend to be more developed than the capacities needed to operationalize them. The pattern is further consistent with Arcelo (2003), who identified that private HEIs in the Philippines systematically underinvest in research infrastructure relative to instruction, limiting the scope and rigor of faculty research outputs over time.

These imply that Aldersgate College's path toward full ACSCU-ACI research compliance requires a prioritized and differentiated response: high-severity gaps in faculty capacity, publication output, and resource provisioning demand immediate, resource-intensive interventions, while moderate-severity gaps in governance and policy culture can be addressed through formalization and enforcement of existing structures. Failure to address all five gap dimensions concurrently risks undermining the sustainability of any partial compliance gains.

Section 3. Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF)

Figure 1



The Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (**CRQIF**) was developed based on the assessment findings of the institution's compliance with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards. The framework adopts the principle of continuous quality improvement by systematically identifying institutional strengths and areas requiring enhancement, prioritizing research gaps according to their level of severity, implementing targeted interventions, and continuously monitoring outcomes to ensure sustained improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment revealed that Aldersgate College demonstrates a highly compliant level with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards, indicating that institutional policies, governance mechanisms, and research systems are generally aligned with accreditation expectations. However, compliance varies across specific indicators, particularly in faculty research productivity, publication output, research funding, and research capacity development. These findings suggest that while the institution possesses a strong structural foundation, sustained improvements in research culture and scholarly productivity remain essential.

The identified institutional gaps served as the basis for developing the Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF), which provides a systematic and evidence-based roadmap for strengthening research governance, faculty capability,

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on research quality assurance in Philippine higher education and offers a practical model that may be adapted by other higher education institutions pursuing continuous research quality improvement and accreditation excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that Aldersgate College, Inc. has established a strong institutional foundation for research quality assurance, as evidenced by its overall **Highly Compliant** rating with the ACSCU-ACI Research Standards. Nevertheless, the identified institutional gaps suggest the need for sustained and strategic interventions to strengthen research governance and promote continuous quality improvement. The College administration should institutionalize the proposed **Continuous Research Quality Improvement Framework (CRQIF)** as an integral component of its strategic quality assurance system. Regular policy reviews should ensure continued responsiveness to evolving accreditation standards and national higher education priorities. Structured mentorship involving experienced researchers should be institutionalized to support novice researchers throughout the research and publication process. Workload policies may also be reviewed to provide adequate time for scholarly activities without compromising instructional responsibilities.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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