

Higher Education Associations and Regional Accrediting Commissions

Principles for Effective Assessment of Student Achievement

Federal law requires that a higher education institution undergoing accreditation provide evidence of “success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution’s mission.” Both aspects of this requirement—the insistence upon achievement, and the tailoring to institutional mission—are critically important. The demonstration of quality is a fundamental responsibility of all colleges and universities, but both the kinds of quality and the methods used to measure it will differ depending on the mission of the institution. More specifically, through the exact content of these criteria and the methods for measuring them will differ, all institutions should be expected to provide evidence of success in three domains:

1. Evidence of the student learning experience. Institutions should be able to define and evaluate how their students are learning: i.e. institutions should be able to describe the kinds of experiences that they expect students to have inside and outside the classroom. Relevant evidence may pertain to targets for the kinds of reading and writing assignments that students should complete; levels of personal interaction with faculty members; residential and/or co-curricular components of the learning experience, and other learning experiences that the institution deems relevant to its mission.
2. Evaluation of student academic performance. Institutions should be able to define meaningful curricular goals, and they must have defensible standards for evaluation whether students are achieving those goals. Appropriate methods for the assessment of student work may include, among other approaches, meaningful and rigorous faculty evaluation and grading or external benchmarking.
3. Post-graduation outcomes. Institutions should be able to articulate how they prepare students consistently with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives, and where appropriate, further education. They should collect and provide data about whether they are meeting these goals. Relevant kinds of data may include completion rates, job placement rates, levels of post-graduation civic participation, kinds of jobs and vocations chosen, surveys pertaining to alumni satisfaction and success, and data on other post-graduation goals relevant to the institution’s mission.

The accreditation process needs to allow institutions flexibility with regard to the methods for measuring progress toward these goals. It is a mistake to conflate particular means for measuring goals with the achievement of those goals. Measures of all kinds will work best if they are integrated into the teaching and administration of colleges and universities, analyzed on a regular basis, and summarized in the accreditation process.

The above statement is intended to emphasize the need to assess effectively student achievement, and the importance of conducting such assessments in ways that are congruent with the institution’s mission. –This document was endorsed by the Higher Education Associations (AACC, AASCU, ACE, AAU, APLU, NAICU) and Regional Accreditation Commissions (NEASC-CIHE), MSCHE, NCA-HLC, NWCCU, SACS, WASC-ACCJC, WASC-ACSCU), July 2013.

New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC)

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE)

**In order for USM to be continued in accreditation, we must submit an assessment report that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:*

“fully engaging faculty and staff in the design and implementation of a comprehensive and systematic approach to program review and assessment of student learning across all academic programs and using the results for improvement.”

**NEASC requires that USM address the following assessment standards in the interim reports and in the full accreditation report (Spring 2021).*

* The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

* The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

*The institution's approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty (4.51).

*Faculty accept the responsibility for ensuring that considerations of program improvement are informed by a shared understanding of what and how students are learning in the program (5.12).

Source: NEASC Standards for Accreditation, 2011