

New Accreditation Standards Primer

Standard Two: Student Learning Programs and Services

There are four accreditation standards and six themes. Colleges are expected to address both standards and themes. Here you will find a primer for Standard Two: Student Learning Programs and Services and Effectiveness. Contact the Office of Institutional Research for more information or visit the Western Association of Schools and College's web site (WASC) <http://www.wascweb.org/>

Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

The institution offers high-quality instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services that facilitate and demonstrate the achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The institution provides an environment that supports learning, enhances student understanding and appreciation of diversity, and encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students.

A. Instructional Programs

The institution offers high-quality instructional programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student outcomes leading to degrees, certificates, employment, or transfer to other higher education institutions or programs consistent with its mission. Instructional programs are systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all instructional activities offered in the name of the institution.

1. The institution demonstrates that all instructional programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, address and meet the mission of the institution and uphold its integrity.
2. The institution assures the quality and improvement of all instructional courses and programs offered in the name of the institution, including collegiate, developmental, and pre-collegiate courses and programs, continuing and community education, study abroad, short-term training courses and programs, programs for international students, and contract or other special programs, regardless of type of credit awarded, delivery mode, or location.
3. The institution requires of all academic and vocational degree programs a component of general education based on a carefully

considered philosophy that is clearly stated in its catalog. **The institution, relying on the expertise of its faculty, determines the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education curriculum by examining the stated learning outcomes for the course. General education has comprehensive learning outcomes for the students who complete it, including the following:**

4. All degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established interdisciplinary core.

5. Students completing vocational and occupational certificates and degrees demonstrate technical and professional competencies that meet employment and other applicable standards and are prepared for external licensure and certification

6. The institution assures that students and prospective students receive clear and accurate information about educational courses and programs and transfer policies. **The institution describes its degrees and certificates in terms of their purpose, content, course requirements, and expected student learning outcomes. In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning objectives consistent with those in the institution's officially approved course outline.**

7. In order to assure the academic integrity of the teaching-learning process, the institution uses and makes public governing board-adopted policies on academic freedom and responsibility, student academic honesty, and specific institutional beliefs or worldviews. These policies make clear the institution's commitment to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

8. Institutions offering curricula in foreign locations to students other than U.S. nationals operate in conformity with standards and applicable Commission policies.

B. Student Support Services

The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission. Student support services address the identified needs of students and enhance a supportive learning environment. The entire student pathway through the institutional experience is characterized by a concern for student access, progress, learning, and success. **The institution systematically assesses student support services using student learning outcomes, faculty and staff input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.**

1. The institution assures the quality of student support services and demonstrates that these services, regardless of location or means of delivery, support student learning and enhance achievement of the mission of the institution.
2. The institution provides a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current
3. The institution researches and identifies the learning support needs of its student population and provides appropriate services and programs to address those needs.
4. The institution evaluates student support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. **Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.**

C. Library and Learning Support Services

Library and other learning support services for students are sufficient to support the institution's instructional programs and intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural activities in whatever format and wherever they are offered. Such services include library services and collections, tutoring, learning centers, computer laboratories, and learning technology development and training. The institution provides access and training to students so that library and other learning support services may be used effectively and efficiently. **The institution systematically assesses these services using student learning outcomes, faculty input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of the services.**

1. The institution supports the quality of its instructional programs by providing library and other learning support services that are sufficient in quantity, currency, depth, and variety to facilitate educational offerings, regardless of location or means of delivery.
2. The institution evaluates library and other learning support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. **Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.**

Themes

In addition to the standards there are 6 themes. These themes thread throughout these standards. These themes can provide guidance and structure to self-reflective dialogue and evaluation of institutional effectiveness. The themes are as follows:

1. Institutional Commitments

The standards ask institutions to make a commitment in action to providing high quality education congruent with institutional mission. Throughout the standards, the commission asks that institutions insure the consistency between mission and institution goals and plans and insure that the mission is more than a statement of intention -- that it guides institutional action. The standards also ask that an institution commit to supporting student learning as its primary mission.

2. Evaluation, Planning, and Improvement

The standards require ongoing institutional evaluation and improvement to help serve students better. Evaluation focuses on student achievement, student learning, and the effectiveness of processes, policies, and organization. Improvement is achieved through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, implementation, and re-evaluation. The planning cycle is comprised of evaluation, goal setting, resource distribution, implementation, and reevaluation.

3. Student Learning Outcomes

The development of Student Learning Outcomes is one of the key themes in these standards. The theme has to do with the institution consciously and robustly demonstrating the effectiveness of its efforts to produce and support student learning by developing student learning outcomes at the course, program, and degree level.

4. Organization

This requirement means that the institution must have in place the organizational means to identify and make public the learning outcomes, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in producing those outcomes, and to make improvements. This requirement for adequate staff, resources and organizational structure (communication and decision making structures) is not new to accreditation standards, but the new expectation is that these be oriented to produce and support student learning. Consequently, they will be evaluated in part by how well they support learning.

5. Dialogue

The standards are designed to facilitate college engagement in inclusive, informed, and intentional dialogue about institutional quality and improvement. The dialogue should purposefully guide institutional change. All members of the college community should participate in this reflection and exchange about student achievement, student learning, and the effectiveness of its processes, policies, and organization. For the dialogue to have its intended effect, it should be based on reliable information about the college's programs and services and evidence on how well the institution is meeting student needs. The institutional dialogue should result in ongoing self-reflection and conscious improvement.

6. Institutional Integrity

This theme deals with the institution's demonstrated concern with honesty, truthfulness, and the manner in which it represents itself to all stakeholders, internal and external. This theme speaks to the intentions of an institution as well as to how it carries them out. It requires that the institution demonstrate regard for issues of equity and diversity. Finally, it expects that an institution be self-reflective and honest with itself in all its operations.