

## The Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation* and Core Components

Criterion	Criterion Statement	Core Components
<b>Criterion One: Mission and Integrity</b>	The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.	1A. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
		1B. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
		1C. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization
		1D. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
		1E. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.
<b>Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future</b>	The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.	2A. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
		2B. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
		2C. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
		2D. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

<p><b>Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching</b></p>	<p>The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.</p>	<p>3A. The organization’s goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.</p> <p>3B. The organization values and supports effective teaching.</p> <p>3C. The organization creates effective learning environments.</p> <p>3D. The organization’s learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.</p>
<p><b>Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge</b></p>	<p>The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.</p>	<p>4A. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.</p> <p>4B. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.</p> <p>4C. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.</p> <p>4D. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.</p>
<p><b>Criterion Five: Engagement and Service</b></p>	<p>As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.</p>	<p>5A. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.</p> <p>5B. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.</p> <p>5C. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.</p> <p>5D. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.</p>

## Commission Statement on Assessment of Student Learning

*By adopting a formal position statement for the Commission, the Board of Trustees explains the premises on which it creates certain policies.*

*Position statements, therefore, amplify the intent of policies and are not policies in and of themselves.*

*Within the position statement, the Board points to relevant policies. Implementation of those policies, therefore, should honor the fundamental intent established by the Board in its formal position statement.*

► **For further information** contact Steven Crow, Executive Director [scrow@hlcommission.org](mailto:scrow@hlcommission.org)

The Commission posited in October 1989 that assessment of student academic achievement is an essential component of every organization's effort to evaluate overall effectiveness. The experience of the past fourteen years has demonstrated that it is key to improving student learning. Assessment of student academic achievement is fundamental for all organizations that place student learning at the center of their educational endeavors.

Among the public's many expectations of higher education, the most basic is that students will learn, and in particular that they will learn what they need to know to attain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in the twenty-first century. The focus has moved from considering resources as primary evidence of the quality of education to expecting documentation of student learning. An organization's focus on achieved student learning is critical not only to promoting and improving effective curricular and cocurricular learning experiences and to providing evidence of the quality of educational experiences and programs, but also to enhancing the public's perception of the value of higher education.

The Commission appreciates that effective assessment can take a variety of forms and involve a variety of processes. However, faculty members, with meaningful input from students and strong support from the administration and governing board, should have the fundamental role in developing and sustaining systematic assessment of student learning. Their assessment strategy should be informed by the organization's mission and include explicit public statements regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies students should possess as a result of completing course and program requirements; it also should document the values, attitudes, and behaviors faculty expect students to have developed. Moreover, while strong assessment should provide data that satisfy any externally mandated accountability requirements, its effectiveness in improving student learning relies on its integration into the organization's processes for program review, departmental and organization planning, and unit and organizational budgeting.

An organization's commitment to and capacity for effective assessment of student learning will figure more prominently than ever in the accreditation relationship established between the Commission and that organization. The Criteria for Accreditation, the Core Components, and the Examples of Evidence adopted by the Commission in 2003 forge important new links between assessment of student learning and accreditation. More than just an effective strategy for accountability or an effective management process for curriculum improvement, assessment of student achievement is essential for each higher learning organization that values its effect on the learning of its students. Therefore, an organization committed to understanding and improving the learning opportunities and environments it provides students will be able to document the relationship between assessment of and improvement in student learning.

*Adopted: February 21, 2003*

## Commission Statement on General Education

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Understanding and appreciating diverse cultures, mastering multiple modes of inquiry, effectively analyzing and communicating information, and recognizing the importance of creativity and values to the human spirit not only allow people to live richer lives but also are a foundation for most careers and for the informed exercise of local, national, and international citizenship. The Commission expects organizations of higher learning to address these important ends, and has embedded this expectation in its Criteria for Accreditation.

Throughout its history, the Commission has believed that quality undergraduate higher education involves breadth as well as depth of study. As understood by the Commission, general education is intended to impart common knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and to develop in them the skills and attitudes that an organization's faculty believe every educated person should possess. From an organization's general education, a student acquires a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that the organization identifies as hallmarks of being college educated. Moreover, effective general education helps students gain competence in the exercise of independent intellectual inquiry and also stimulates their examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values.

Effective general education can be shaped to fit unique organizational contexts. As higher education changes, so too do the ways in which organizations create and provide general education. General education must be valued and owned by the organization whether its courses are created, purchased, or shared; whether faculty are full-time, part-time, or employed by a partner organization; and whether the organization creates general education opportunities primarily through curriculum or relies heavily on experiential and off-campus opportunities to achieve its learning goals for general education.

Regardless of how a higher learning organization frames the general education necessary to fulfill its mission and goals, it clearly and publicly articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of the general education it provides for its students. It also shows its commitment to the centrality of general education by including an appropriate component of general education in all undergraduate programs of substantial length, whether they lead to certificates, diplomas, or degrees. Moreover, the organization's faculty exercises oversight for general education and, working with the administration, regularly assesses its effectiveness against the organization's stated goals for student learning.

*Adopted: February 21, 2003*





# Commission Statements

## Commission Statement on Diversity

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The Commission recognizes that much of the vitality that characterizes the higher education system in the United States is derived from the diversity found within the universe of organizations that comprise it. The Commission further recognizes that the diversity inherent among the people of the United States enriches American higher education and contributes to the capacity that students develop for living in a culturally pluralistic and interdependent world.

Diversity is represented in many forms, ranging from differences in organizational mission and educational levels to differences in the ideas, viewpoints, perspectives, values, religious beliefs, backgrounds, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, human capacity, and ethnicity of those who attend and work in the organizations. Individual and group differences add richness to teaching and learning, and also challenge them. People become more aware of their differences and similarities in a variety of ways, including through the processes of discovery and exploration, interaction, collaboration, and partnering. In this context, the Commission champions diversity as a value to be upheld, and it looks to its member organizations to promote diversity in both concept and practice as they realize their respective missions.

Recognizing diversity is one of the values embraced by the Commission in its overall statement of mission and its new Criteria for Accreditation. Therefore, member organizations are encouraged to evaluate their respective missions, visions, values, and character to determine how well they address issues of diversity when providing enriching educational experiences and services for their constituencies. Organizations teach by example; they model approaches to diversity by conducting their operations in an equitable and just manner.

An organization that provides diverse experiences for its constituencies establishes an environment in which greater intellectual development can occur, and from which its constituencies can learn that focusing on commonalities, while understanding differences, binds peoples and cultures. Valuing diversity relates to experiencing it; thus, people in an environment that encourages inclusiveness and discourages acts of insensitivity and disrespect can become more enlightened. The Commission urges its member organizations to create and maintain teaching and learning environments that provide educational opportunities for diverse individuals and groups. In addition, the Commission urges its member organizations to provide learning environments, larger than its classroom settings, in which students can contribute to and learn from the diversity that broad life exposure offers.

The Commission recognizes the value that member organizations place on their histories, traditions, and missions and the effect of such factors on their policies and practices. Therefore, the Commission does not prescribe a set of actions to address issues of diversity. However, through its Criteria, the Commission does expect its member organizations to evidence positive responses to issues of diversity and to show the relationship of those responses to the integrity of their operations.

*Adopted: February 21, 2003*



NOTE: This DRAFT document is a stand-alone resource piece for the web and will be integrated into the Commission Handbook and the Peer Reviewer Manual in 2008.

## **STUDENT LEARNING, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCREDITATION**

Among the public's many expectations of higher education, the most basic is that students will learn, and in particular that they will learn what they need to know to attain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in a global and diverse society. Student learning is central to all higher education organizations; therefore, these organizations define educational quality--one of their core purposes--by how well they achieve their declared mission relative to student learning. A focus on achieved student learning is critical not only to a higher education organization's ability to promote and improve curricular and co-curricular learning experiences and to provide evidence of the quality of educational experiences and programs, but also to fulfill the most basic public expectations and needs of higher education.

In October 1989, the Commission first posited that assessment of student learning is an essential component of every organization's effort to evaluate overall organizational effectiveness. In February 2003, The Higher Learning Commission adopted a newly revised position statement on assessment of student learning (see Section 3.4-2 of the *Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition*) to reaffirm and strengthen this position. Through the Criteria for Accreditation and multiple Core Components, the Commission makes clear the centrality of student learning to effective higher education organizations and extends and deepens its commitment to and expectations for assessment. Indeed, the Commission asserts that assessment is more than a response to demands for accountability, more than a means for curricular improvement. Effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning.

### **Fundamental Questions for Conversations on Student Learning**

Six fundamental questions serve as prompts for conversations about student learning and the role of assessment in affirming and improving that learning:

- 1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, degrees, and students?**
- 2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?**
- 3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?**
- 4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for student learning and for assessment of student learning?**
- 5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?**
- 6. In what ways do you inform the public and other stakeholders about what and how well your students are learning?**

In using these questions, an organization should ground its conversations in its distinct mission, context, commitments, goals and intended outcomes for student learning. In addition to informing ongoing improvement in student learning, these conversations will assist organizations and peer reviewers in discerning evidence for the Criteria and Core Components.

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The fundamental questions and the conversations they prompt are intended to support a strategy of inquiry into student learning. Further, the questions are intended to support this strategy of inquiry, built on principles of good practice, as a participative and iterative process that:

- ◆ Provides information regarding student learning,
- ◆ Engages stakeholders in analyzing and using information on student learning to confirm and improve teaching and learning,
- ◆ Produces evidence that confirms achievement of intended student learning outcomes, and
- ◆ Guides broader educational and organizational improvement.

In other words, organizations assess student learning in meaningful, useful, and workable ways to evaluate how they are achieving their commitments and to act on the results in ways that advance student learning and improve educational quality. Effective assessment of student learning is a matter of commitment, not a matter of compliance.

### **Evaluating the Organization's Efforts to Assess and Improve Student Learning**

The centrality of student learning and the fundamental nature of assessment as a strategy for understanding and improving that learning are embedded directly into the Criteria and Core Components. Thus, peer reviewers seeking evidence for the Criteria and Core Components will discern evidence of the commitment to student learning and the meaningful use of assessment to confirm and improve student learning. Neither the Criteria nor Core Components prescribe specific methods for assessing and improving student learning. It is inevitable and desirable that diverse organizations exhibit a wide variety of approaches and embed assessment of student learning in a variety of institutional forms and processes. Thus, the Commission and its peer reviewers will not approach the review with expectations for specific ways in which assessment efforts are structured and implemented, but rather with a focus on student learning and the use of assessment to confirm and improve that learning within the context and mission of the organization.

To remain focused on student learning and assessment as a strategy for confirming and improving that learning, peer reviewers may use the fundamental questions as prompts to engage faculty, staff, students, and administrators in conversations about the organization's (a) commitment to improving student learning and educational quality; (b) sustained effort to collect, analyze, and use data and information on student learning; (c) evidence that students have achieved the learning intended; (d) shared responsibility for student learning and assessment of student learning; and (e) successes and challenges in improving student learning and educational quality through assessment. These conversations will assist peer reviewers in understanding the organization's commitment to student learning and approaches to assessment of that learning within the organization's context and mission. Further, the conversation will assist in discerning areas for consultation and in identifying and validating evidence related to the Criteria and Core Components. Peer reviewers will base their accreditation-related judgments and recommendations on this evidence as it relates to the Criteria and Core Components.

Finally, the Commission realizes that assessment of student learning is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires substantial time; that is often marked by fits and starts; and that takes long-term commitment and leadership. It is reasonable for organizations to use different approaches and timetables in implementing their assessment of student learning efforts. Nevertheless, the Commission expects that each organization can demonstrate a sustained effort to implement assessment processes that are workable, reasonable, meaningful, and useful in confirming and improving student learning and in assuring and advancing broader educational and organizational quality.

Additional resources related to assessment of student learning, including the document, *Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Principles For Good Practices*, which was endorsed by all regional accrediting agencies, can be found on Commission's website: [www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org) under the link for "Guidelines."

## CRITERIA & CORE COMPONENTS RELATED TO STUDENT LEARNING

All of the Criteria for Accreditation and multiple core components speak to student learning and to an organization that holds student learning central to educational and organizational quality (see below). Further, Two Core Components in Criterion Two and Criterion Three speak directly to assessment of student learning (see 2.C and 3.A below).

The Fundamental Questions serve as prompts for conversations about student learning and about the role and effectiveness of assessment in confirming and improving that learning. Further, these conversations on student learning will identify potential evidence toward fulfillment of the Criteria and their Core Components. Indeed, providing evidence for multiple Criteria and Core components assumes an organization has strong, effective assessment and evaluation processes that produce this evidence. **Effective assessment of student learning will generate evidence (not necessarily all that is needed) for multiple Criteria & core components.**

- ◆ **Criterion 1, Core Component A.** The organization's mission documents are clear and publicly articulate the organization's commitments.
- ◆ **Criterion 1, Core Component D.** The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- ◆ **Criterion 2, Core Component C.** The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- ◆ **Criterion 2, Core Component D.** All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.
- ◆ **Criterion 3, Core Component A.** The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
- ◆ **Criterion 3, Core Component B.** The organization values and supports effective teaching.
- ◆ **Criterion 3, Core Component C.** The organization creates effective learning environments.
- ◆ **Criterion 3, Core Component D.** The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.
- ◆ **Criterion 4, Core Component A.** The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
- ◆ **Criterion 4, Core Component B.** The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
- ◆ **Criterion 4, Core Component C.** The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
- ◆ **Criterion 5, Core Component A.** The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- ◆ **Criterion 5, Core Component B.** The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage its constituencies and communities.
- ◆ **Criterion 5, Core Component D.** Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.





Academic  
Quality Improvement  
Program

The Higher Learning Commission NCA

# AQIP's Expectations on Assessing Student Learning

Institutions participating in AQIP are part of an intensive, collaborative effort to reshape their cultures and to make a commitment to continuous quality improvement their constant focus. Consequently, a major objective of every AQIP institution is the evolution and strengthening of an institutional culture that values using performance data to drive continuous improvement of processes within a systems view of the interdependence of instructional structures, functions, and policies. Valuing assessment, therefore, forms the core of being in AQIP.

For accredited Higher Learning Commission colleges and universities, this emphasis on the central importance of assessment is not new, and most institutions have been hard at work for years weaving assessment into the fabric of their operations. While participating in AQIP they will continue to measure student learning — and use the results to improve teaching and learning processes as well as all other institutional processes that contribute to student learning.

AQIP significantly increases assessment's importance (and expands its scope, form, and purpose) so it is critical that institutions understand this emphasis.

The most fundamental of the AQIP Categories, *Helping Students Learn*, requires an institution to address specific questions about its teaching-learning processes, about the performance of these processes, and the way the institution uses results data to improve. But so do all the Categories, because everything a higher education organization does ultimately affects its students' learning.

## **Systems Portfolio and Systems Appraisal**

An institution joining AQIP will begin to compile its **Systems Portfolio**, presenting concrete evidence answering all of the questions posed under each of the nine Categories in preparation for a **Systems Appraisal** that will occur three years after participation in a **Strategy Forum**.

The evaluation and feedback an institution receives from this process will help it to improve its learning assessment practices, and ensure that it receives maximum benefit from them.

Institutions making ineffective progress will receive directed advice and assistance, and give evidence of acting assertively on it, or they will be guided out of AQIP and back to the standard (or PEAQ) accreditation process.

AQIP demands that measuring the results of key processes become habitual *throughout* an institution, since knowing how well a process performs currently is vital for improvement. In AQIP, the expectation that institutions will establish performance metrics to gather and analyze data extends beyond *Helping Students Learn*. Each of the other eight AQIP Categories deals with a set of key institutional processes (e.g., planning, human resources, stakeholder needs determination, support services), and *each* Category asks, using specific questions, how the institution decides what data to collect, how it gathers it, and what the data reveals about levels and trends in institutional performance. In addition, each Category asks the institution to compare its performance data with that of other organizations, so that it knows clearly whether it should be satisfied with current performance, or whether opportunities exist for improvement. Thus, the pattern for student learning assessment found in *Helping Students Learn* is reinforced throughout the AQIP Categories, building in AQIP institutions a culture of individual and organizational learning that values realistic measurement and its use for improvement and innovation.

AQIP reserves an entire Category, **Measuring Effectiveness**, to examine how an institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself, to drive performance improvement, and to achieve its mission and goals. In doing so, AQIP stimulates a participating institution to scrutinize, continuously, the kind of data and information it collects; the measures it uses to evaluate its key processes; its storage, analysis, and distribution of this data; and, most

importantly, how it analyzes and uses data to drive improvement. By triggering an institution to ask itself such penetrating questions, AQIP helps again to stimulate the development an *information-based* culture that thrives on the effective use of data.

### **Action Projects and Strategy Forums**

AQIP does not rely merely on conducting the *Systems Appraisal*, a searching comprehensive evaluation, every four years, but it also drives institutions to move toward a culture that values measurement and process improvement by requiring participants to identify and begin **Action Projects** soon after they join. Every AQIP institution always has *at least three* Action Projects underway. When it ends one, it begins another. Action Projects drive targeted improvement.

These ambitious projects are crafted to serve two purposes: (1) to help the institution develop the characteristic of a high-performance institution, characteristics articulated in AQIP's ten Principles of High Performance Organizations; and (2) to engage the institution's administrators, faculty, and staff in concrete work that capitalizes on an institutional opportunity for improvement, critical problem-solving, or innovation. Essentially, the projects serve as intense action learning cycles that focus the institution on hands-on, useful work that further drives change in the entire institution's culture.

Developing Action Projects that serve these goals is difficult, particularly for institutions new to AQIP; the Strategy Forum provides an event in which peers from other AQIP institutions work together to help institutions create the most potentially valuable *Action Projects* possible. Action Projects promote a culture of learning and assessment when they work toward deepening an institutional culture that values the Principles of High Performance Organizations (especially 1, 4, 8, and 9). In addition, at least one of every institution's *Action Projects* must address directly the processes included in *Helping Students Learn*, a requirement that forces an institution to declare measurable targets for improvement of key teaching and learning processes and then to implement changes that will bring that improvement to reality quickly. *Annual Updates* hold institutions responsible for the progress they are making on the *Action Projects* they have undertaken, and provide assistance to institutions that need it.

### **How the Higher Learning Commission's fundamental questions about student assessment are addressed in the nine AQIP categories and questions**

#### **1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?**

**Your institution should publish, on its website or in paper publications, clear descriptions of the learning expected of students who complete your degree and other credential programs.** This information should be written in a form that the public (i.e., prospective students, parents, employers, etc.) can understand, and should explain why you believe the knowledge and skills you teach are valuable for students to learn. In addition, defining clearly the learning expected in the component elements of each program (i.e., in specific courses or co-curricular activities) will help students and others understand the coherence and logic of your program requirements, and will help you in discovering ways to improve these programs.

**Your institution should make certain that the level and scope of learning expected for each degree and credential you award matches the expectations held by respected higher education organizations.** Guaranteeing wide public understanding of the value of your degrees and credentials is essential in serving your stakeholders effectively and ethically.

- 1C1 What common student learning objectives do you hold for all students (regardless of their status or program of study), and what pattern of knowledge and skills do you expect them to possess upon completion of their general and specialized studies?
- 1C2 By what means do you ensure that student learning expectations, practices, and development objectives align with your mission, vision, and philosophy?
- 1P1 How do you determine your common student learning objectives as well as specific program learning objectives? Who is involved in setting these objectives?

- 1P10 How are cocurricular development goals aligned with curricular learning objectives?
- 1P4 How do you communicate expectations regarding student preparation and student learning objectives (for programs, courses, and the awarding of specific degrees or credentials) to prospective and current students? How do admissions, student support, and registration services aid in this process?
- 1P8 How do you monitor the currency and effectiveness of your curriculum? What process is in place for changing or discontinuing programs and courses?
- 1P12 How do you discover how well prepared the students who are completing programs, degrees, and certificates are for further education or employment?
- 1R2 What is your evidence that students have acquired the knowledge and skills base required by the institution and its stakeholders (that is, other educational institutions and employers) for the awarding of specific degrees or credentials? And 1R4 How do these results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?

**2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?**

**The expectations that you hold for students must be applied, in practice, rigorously and equitably in order for your students and the degrees they earn to maintain the respect and value they deserve.** Carrying the same degree of quality assurance down to the course level will help to ensure the quality of programs, and will make it easier to diagnose and address quality problems if and when they occur.

- 1P6 How do you determine and document effective teaching and learning? How are these expectations communicated across the institution?
- 1P11 How do you determine the processes for student assessment?
- 1P13 What measures of student performance do you collect and analyze regularly?
- 1R1 What are your results for common student learning objectives as well as specific program learning objectives?
- 1R4 How do these results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?
- 7P1 How do you select, manage, and use information and data (including current performance information) to support student learning (Category 1), overall institutional objectives (Category 2), strategies (Category 8), and improvement (all Categories) efforts?
- 7P2 How do you determine the needs of your departments and units related to information and data collection, storage, and accessibility? How are these needs met?

**3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?**

**To assure that the educational programs, degrees, and credentials that you offer meet the needs of your students, their families, employers, funding agents, and other stakeholders in your institution, you must analyze the performance data you gather.** Through analysis, you should be able to demonstrate that your expectations and programs must be up-to-date, and meet the immediate and long-term needs of students and others, today and into the future. This outcome — that the students and others you serve are satisfied by the programs and services you offer — depends both on the learning outputs of your programs and on the relevance of those outcomes to students' and others' needs.

- 1C4 What practices do you use to ensure your design and delivery of student learning options are preparing students to live in a diverse world and that the options accommodate a variety of student learning styles?
- 1C5 By what means do you create and maintain a climate that celebrates intellectual freedom, inquiry, reflection, respect for intellectual property, and respect for differing and diverse opinions?
- 3C1 Into what key groups do you subcategorize your students and other stakeholders? How do you define and differentiate these student and other stakeholder groups?
- 3C2 What are the short-term and long-term requirements and expectations of your student and other stakeholder groups?
- 3P1 How do you identify the changing needs of your student groups? How do you analyze and select a course of action regarding these needs?
- 3P2 How do you build and maintain a relationship with your students?
- 3P3 How do you identify the changing needs of your key stakeholder groups? How do you analyze and select a course of action regarding these need
- 3P6 How do you collect complaint information from students and other stakeholders? How do you analyze this feedback both in a formative and summative manner and select a course of action? How do you communicate your actions to students and stakeholders?
- 3P7 How do you determine student and other stakeholder satisfaction? What measures of student and other stakeholder satisfaction do you collect and analyze regularly?

- 3R1 What are your results for student satisfaction with your performance? [3R5] How do these results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community? Address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.
- 3R3 What are your results for stakeholder satisfaction with your performance? [3R5] How do these results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community? Address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.

#### **4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?**

**Designing effective educational programs and delivering them to those who need them is a shared responsibility of an institution's board, administrators, faculty, and staff.** Seeking information from stakeholders and using it in making institutional decisions is essential, but responsibility for those decisions ultimately by *all* of the professionals and others employed by the institution.

- 1P2 How do you design new programs and courses to facilitate student learning? How do you balance educational market issues with student needs in designing responsive academic programming?
- 1P3 How do you determine the preparation required of students for the specific curricula, programs, courses, and learning they will pursue?
- 1P5 How do you help students select programs of study that match their needs, interests and abilities? In providing this help, how are discrepancies between the necessary and actual preparation of students and their learning styles detected and addressed?
- 1P7 How do you build an effective and efficient course delivery system? How do delivery decisions balance student and institutional needs?
- 1P9 How do you determine student and faculty needs relative to learning support? How are learning support areas involved in the student learning and development process?
- 5P1 How do your leaders set directions in alignment with your mission, vision, and values and that are conducive to high performance, individual development and initiative, organizational learning, and innovation? How do these directions take into account the needs and expectations of students and key stakeholder groups and create a strong focus on students and learning?
- 5P6 How do your leaders communicate a shared mission, vision, values and high performance expectations regarding institutional directions and opportunities, learning, continuous improvement, ethics and equity, social responsibilities, and community service and involvement?
- 9P3 How do you create and build relationships within your institution? How do you assure integration and communication across these relationships?
- 9P4 What measures of building collaborative relationships do you collect and analyze regularly?

#### **5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of assessment of student learning efforts?**

**Assessment can demonstrate to the public that the programs you offer, and the students you graduate, have achieved your educational goals.** A truly effective college or university is never satisfied with its current levels of performance, but always strives to improve upon these, both by raising its expectations for student learning and by providing better programs to help students achieve that learning.

- 111 How do you improve your current processes and systems for helping students learn and develop?
- 112 With regard to your current results for student learning and development, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will they be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?
- 311 How do you improve your current processes and systems for understanding the needs of your key student and other stakeholder groups?
- 312 With regard to your current results for understanding the needs of your key student and other stakeholder groups, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will they be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?
- 7R1 What is the evidence that your system for measuring effectiveness meets your institution's needs in accomplishing its mission and goals?
- 711 How do you improve your current processes and systems for measuring effectiveness?
- 712 With regard to your current results for measuring effectiveness, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting and how will these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?
- 8P5 How you select measures and set performance projections for your institutional strategies and action plans?
- 8P8 What measures of the effectiveness of your system(s) for planning continuous improvement do you collect and analyze regularly?

## Commission Guidance on Determining Qualified Faculty

As noted in various sections of the third edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, in order to be responsive to rapid change, the *Handbook* was structured so that it could be quickly modified and updated through print replacement sections and through new and improved Web-based materials. The following information is intended to provide additional guidance to higher education organizations and to peer reviewers in determining and evaluating faculty qualifications in various higher education contexts. The guidance offered here serves to illuminate the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components that speak to the importance of higher education organizations employing a qualified faculty for the varied and essential roles faculty members play.

The Commission's *Handbook* states that a "qualified faculty" consists of "people who by formal education and tested experience know what students must learn." It goes on to say that such faculties "create the curricular pathways through which students gain the competencies and skills they need." (Core Component 3b)

### Knowing What Students Must Learn

- Within a specific discipline or field of study, "knowing what students must learn" refers to a faculty member's ability to understand and convey the essentials of the discipline that a student should master at various course and program levels. Qualified faculty are able to engage professionally with colleagues in determining the specific, stated learning objectives for all graduates of a specific program, as well as the full scope of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriate to the degree awarded.
- In addition to knowing what students should learn within specific disciplines, qualified faculty also know the broad learning objectives of the college or university for all of its students. Criterion 4 states that an organization should create an academic environment that promotes "inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission," The Commission expects that, through the higher education curricula that faculty develop, students gain "a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry." Further, qualified faculty are able to determine "the usefulness of curricula to students who live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society." (Core Components 4b and 4c.)
- Qualified faculty not only know what students should learn but *whether and how much* they learn, since an organization should be able to provide "evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission." (Criterion Three)

### Using Credentials or Degrees Earned as a Basis for Determining Qualified Faculty

- Faculty credentials generally refer to the degrees faculty have earned at certain levels that provide a foundation for knowing what students should learn in a specific discipline or field. Over the years, some hallmarks and common expectations for faculty credentials have emerged within the higher education community, such as:
  - Faculty teaching in higher education organizations should have completed a significant program of study in the discipline they will teach and/or for which they will develop curricula, with substantial coursework at least one level above that of the courses being taught or developed. Further, it is assumed that successful completion of a coherent degree better prepares a person than an unstructured collection of credit courses;
  - Faculty teaching in undergraduate programs should hold a degree at least one level above that of the program in which they are teaching, and those teaching general education courses typically hold a master's degree or higher and should have completed substantial graduate coursework in the discipline of those courses;
  - Faculty teaching in graduate programs typically hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline;
  - Faculty overseeing doctoral education should know how to conduct research appropriate to the program and degree.

These continue to be basic expectations adhered to by many colleges and universities and, therefore, most colleges and universities will integrate most of them into their faculty handbooks and hiring policies.

- Qualified faculty are identified *in part* by credentials, but there are limitations to considering only the degrees earned. For example,
  - Besides credentials, other vital attributes are necessary to qualify someone to teach, such as being able to design curricula, to develop and implement effective pedagogy, and to appreciate the breadth of knowledge so vital in quality undergraduate and graduate education;
  - Knowledge of a specific discipline as indicated by the credential is not all that is required, since faculty carry other significant responsibilities, such as conducting research, advising students, participating in co-curricular activities, and contributing to shared governance;
  - An earned degree does not necessarily attest to a faculty member's ongoing professional development in the field. Knowing what students should know is dependent upon the discovery of new knowledge and "keeping up in the field";
  - Academic disciplines, degree programs, and curricula are not static. Because of changing academic, societal and workforce needs, colleges and universities are developing interdisciplinary and other non-traditional programs that require faculty to think beyond their own disciplines and traditional academic programs to determine what students should know and to design curricula accordingly;
  - In some cases, such as in practice-oriented disciplines or programs, tested experience in the field may be needed as much or more than formal educational preparation at a prescribed level in determining what students should know to practice.

#### Using "Tested Experience" as a Basis for Determining Qualified Faculty

- The value of using tested experience to determine faculty qualifications is largely dependent upon the relevance of the experience both to the degree level and to the specific content of the course(s) for which the faculty member is responsible. Tested experience implies that some objective measure ensures that the individual's knowledge and expertise are sufficient for determining what students must learn and have learned. For example:
  - A faculty member teaching baccalaureate-level courses in human resources or business ethics might not have a degree in business, but can provide evidence of effective work as a practicing labor relations attorney;
  - A faculty member who teaches courses for a pre-associate information technology, may not possess a graduate degree, but this person might have the industry certification and years of experience successfully working in the field;
  - A faculty member teaching the clinical courses in a master's program in education might not have a doctorate in education but, instead, might have documented recognition of excellence in teaching;
  - A faculty member teaching creative writing, painting, or music may have had his/her expertise, ability, and talent validated through publication or through wide critical and public acclaim;
  - A faculty member teaching conversational courses in a Native American or foreign language may demonstrate his/her qualification through formal recognition of competence by tribal elders or through a nationally recognized rating of proficiency in foreign language.

## Following Good Practices in Determining Qualified Faculty

- The Commission expects that an “organization’s resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.” This requires that organizations have, and plan for, a sufficient number of qualified faculty to ensure educational quality. While not all faculty will possess the credentials that are regarded as “hallmarks,” the overall mix of the faculty, within a given program and/or organization, should establish a foundation for maintaining and strengthening educational quality (Core Component 2b. In short, colleges and universities will value in each individual member credentials and/or experience, but the most important consideration is whether all of the members of the faculty together represent the breadth of skills, talents, and knowledge needed by the institution and the program.
- Higher education organizations typically establish and periodically review the minimum qualifications and expectations of faculty teaching in different disciplines and at different levels. Policies and practices are codified and widely shared to ensure consistency and diligence in any review of qualifications for making hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. An organization’s policies should make clear how educational preparation and professional experience are validated and weighed in determining faculty qualifications. While policies might differ among colleges, they should be clearly tied to how each institution determines “who by formal education and tested experience knows what students must learn.”
- Generally, the same guidelines and principles should be used for employing part-time, adjunct, temporary, and/or non-tenure track faculty as are used in employing full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty, whose primary responsibility is teaching. Although some institutions place a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty, or give graduate teaching assistants the predominant responsibility for instruction in many course sections, an organization committed to effective teaching and learning in all courses and programs will be able to demonstrate consistent procedures and careful consideration of qualifications for all instructional faculty.
- A college or university should assist a productive member of the faculty in implementing a useful program of professional development. For a faculty member with minimal credentials but considerable tested experience, that program might well involve completion of degrees, particularly graduate degrees, appropriate to that faculty member’s work. As U.S. higher education addresses the call for the academy to provide education that prepares graduates for demands of the workplace, it is possible that acceptable professional development might include internships or other opportunities to practice in the profession.

The Commission does not dictate hiring standards to be applied to each member of the faculty. In providing this guidance, the Commission reflects its long-standing understanding that it is the responsibility of a college or university to establish and implement its own policies regarding faculty qualifications. The Commission’s concern is about the overall capacity of the faculty to achieve the educational goals of the institution, and to do that, the faculty must be made up of “people who by formal education and tested experience know what students must learn.”