

SECTION 8: Student Achievement

8.1 The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution’s mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success.

(Student achievement) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

Student learning and student success are at the core of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support student learning outcomes for its educational programs. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution provides appropriate academic and student services to support student success.

An institution needs to be able to document its success with respect to student achievement. In doing so, it may use a broad range of criteria to include, as appropriate: enrollment data; retention, graduation, or course completion; job placement rates; state licensing examinations; student portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals.

Note the three related obligations of the institution in order to meet this standard: student achievement goals (target levels of performance) must be identified; data for student achievement must be presented and evaluated (outcomes); and both the goals and the outcomes must be published. For purposes of this standard, “multiple measures” refers to several distinct outcomes, not multiple ways of measuring the same outcome. Being published means in a way accessible to the public—not published only behind an internal firewall.

The standard recognizes that not every institution will utilize the same goals or establish the same targets. For example, an open-admissions institution would generally have a lower target for undergraduate graduation rates than a highly selective institution. An institution that prepares students for transfer to other institutions may use National Student Clearinghouse data for graduation rates while an institution that has little transfer activity might prefer to use IPEDS data. A seminary and an institute of technology may well define job placement “in the field of study” in very different ways. In some cases, institutions may use local data that can only be benchmarked against itself, such as a locally created alumni survey. Nonetheless, every institution has an obligation to establish goals, collect data, and publish this information.

NOTES

In accord with federal regulations, it is expected that the institution will demonstrate its success with respect to student achievement and indicate the criteria and thresholds of acceptability used to determine that success. The criteria are the items to be measured (and published); the thresholds of acceptability are the minimal expectations set by the institution to define its own acceptable level of achievement (i.e., a minimum target). The institution is responsible

for justifying both the criteria it utilizes and the thresholds of acceptability it sets. The items measured and the thresholds of acceptability should be consistent with the institution's mission and the students it serves.

In their reviews, SACSCOC committees will examine and analyze (1) documentation demonstrating success with respect to student achievement, (2) the appropriateness of criteria and thresholds of acceptability used to determine student achievement, and (3) whether the data and other information to document student achievement is appropriately published.

While this standard does not ask what the institution does when it finds it falls short of its own expectations, institutions not meeting their self-identified thresholds of performance would be expected to document efforts to meet expectations. [See especially Standard 7.1 (Institutional planning), as well as Standard 7.2 (Quality Enhancement Plan), Standard 8.2.a (Student outcomes: educational programs), Standard 8.2.b (Student outcomes: general education), and Standard 8.2.c (Student outcomes: academic and student services).]

Questions to Consider

- How does the institution determine appropriate measurable goals and outcomes for student achievement consistent with its mission?
- Does a state board or specialized accreditor expect certain student achievement rates that would be relevant for this standard?
- Are data sources for this information clearly identified?
- If the institution does not use examples of criteria mentioned above, what are the criteria used and why are they appropriate?
- Are both criteria and thresholds of acceptability clearly identified?
- Can the institution justify both criteria and thresholds of acceptability that would be found acceptable by a reasonable external party?
- How does the institution publish this information for the public?

Sample Documentation

- Published evidence containing tables, charts, and/or narrative that include criteria, thresholds of acceptability, and findings related to student achievement.
- Discussion of the underlying rationale for the chosen criteria and thresholds in relation to the institution's mission.
- Data underlying the findings.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policies: [Institutional Obligations for Public Disclosure](#)

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

- CR 7.1 (*Institutional planning*)
Standard 7.2 (*Quality Enhancement Plan*)
Standard 8.2.a (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)
Standard 8.2.b (*Student outcomes: general education*)
Standard 8.2.c (*Student outcomes: academic and student services*)

8.2 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

- a. **Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.**
(*Student outcomes: educational programs*)
- b. **Student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs.**
(*Student outcomes: general education*)
- c. **Academic and student services that support student success.**
(*Student outcomes: academic and student services*)

Rationale and Notes

Student outcomes—both within the classroom and outside of the classroom—are the heart of the higher education experience. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support appropriate student outcomes for its educational programs and related academic and student services that support student success. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution is always asking itself whether it has met those goals and how it can become even better.

Even though the concept of institutional effectiveness may not be explicitly referenced in all of the standards, the accreditation process assumes that all programs and services, wherever offered within the context of the institution's mission and activity, are reviewed as part of the institutional effectiveness process.

When reviewing this standard, peer evaluators will look for evidence of each of the three key elements of the standard, but do so as an integrated activity where the parts are linked. When reporting about the process, it might be useful to consider the process in this fashion: