
Questions to Use in Institutional Evaluation

This *Guide* is designed to provoke thoughtful dialogue and judgment about institutional quality by college communities engaged in self evaluation and by external evaluation teams assigned to affirm the quality of institutions. As either group seeks to evaluate an institution's ability to meet the Accreditation Standards, inquiry – asking questions and seeking answers – is necessary before judgment is made. The following questions are designed to provoke thoughtful reflection about institutional quality and may be asked by either the institution engaged in self-reflection for self evaluation, or by the External Evaluation Team that visits the college. The *Guide* also provides a list of possible sources of evidence that can be used to develop answers to the questions raised through the process of inquiry.

The questions, and lists of possible evidence, are designed to inform discussions of student achievement and learning, such as number of graduates, number of transfer students, retention rates, course completion rates, job placement rates; institutional performance such as the presence and effective use of institutional resources, structures, and policies, to achieve the institutions educational mission; and student learning outcomes such as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that the institution intended students to learn and which are defined by the institution as the intended learning outcomes. There may be many other questions that institutions and team members can and should ask in order to assess educational quality and institutional effectiveness relevant to each college's unique mission.

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.¹
 - How does the institution ensure that all institutional offerings align with the stated mission of the institution?
 - How does the institution ensure that its programs and services are high quality and appropriate to an institution of higher education?
 - How does the institution choose the fields of study in which it offers programs? What are the student achievement outcomes of the institution's programs, i.e., to what extent do students progress through and complete degrees and certificates, gain employment, or transfer to four-year institutions? By what means are programs assessed for currency, teaching and learning strategies, and student learning outcomes?
 - How does the institution ensure that its programs and curricula are current?
 - a. The institution identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with their educational preparation and the diversity, demographics, and economy of its communities. The institution relies upon research and analysis to identify student learning needs and to assess progress toward achieving stated learning outcomes.
 - What research is conducted to inform the college of student learning needs? What means does the institution use to assess students' educational preparedness?
 - How is this information incorporated into program planning?
 - What kind of research is being conducted to determine if students are achieving stated learning outcomes?

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- b. The institution utilizes delivery systems and modes of instruction compatible with the objectives of the curriculum and appropriate to the current and future needs of its students.¹
- How does the institution determine that delivery of instruction supports the objectives and content of its courses?
 - How are delivery methods evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting student needs?
 - What dialogue is taking place about delivery systems and modes of instruction?
 - How effectively are delivery systems and modes of instruction facilitating student learning?
- c. The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements.
- What student learning outcomes has the institution identified for its courses, programs, certificates, and degrees?
 - How and by whom are student learning outcomes and strategies for attaining them created? How and by whom are student learning outcomes and program outcomes assessed? How are the results used for improvement?
 - Are student learning outcomes verifiably at the collegiate level? What assessments are in place for measuring these outcomes? How effectively are the assessments working?
 - What dialogue has occurred about using assessment results to guide improvements to courses, programs, etc.? What improvements have resulted?
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.^{1,2}
- By what criteria and processes does the institution decide to offer developmental, pre-collegiate, continuing and community education, study abroad, short-term training, international student, or contract education programs?
 - Which of these (or other) categories of courses and programs does the institution offer?
 - By what means does the institution ensure that all of its instructional courses and programs are of high quality? Are they all of high quality?

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- What is the process for establishing and evaluating each type of course and program? How does the college determine the appropriate credit type, delivery mode, and location of its courses and programs?
 - How does the institution ensure the quality of all instructional courses and programs offered in its name? Does the institution use evaluation of courses and programs effectively for improvement?
 - a. The institution uses established procedures to design, identify learning outcomes for, approve, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses and programs. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for establishing quality and improving instructional courses and programs.
 - What established policies and institutional processes guide the development and evaluation of courses, programs, certificates, and degrees? What is the role of faculty?
 - Do these procedures lead to assessment of quality and improvement? Who is responsible for identifying appropriate student learning outcome/assessments?
 - Are student learning outcomes and assessments established for each course, program, certificate, and degree?
 - What processes exist to approve and administer courses, programs, certificates, and degrees? Are the processes effective?
 - How are courses, programs, certificates, and degrees evaluated? How often? What are the results of the evaluations?
 - What improvements to courses, programs, certificates, and degrees have occurred as a result of evaluation? How does the institution assure that it relies on faculty discipline expertise for establishing the quality of its courses and programs?
 - b. The institution relies on faculty expertise and the assistance of advisory committees when appropriate to identify competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution regularly assesses student progress towards achieving those outcomes.
 - How are competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes determined? What is the role of faculty? What is the role of advisory committees?
 - How has the institution structured the relationship between student learning outcomes, competency levels for degrees, certificates, programs, and courses?
 - Do students have a clear path to achieving the student learning outcomes required of a course, program, certificate and degree? How well does the institution achieve and evaluate the effectiveness of learning at each level?

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- c. High-quality instruction and appropriate breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning characterize all programs.
- How does the institution demonstrate the quality of its instruction? What evidence exists that all programs are characterized by the variables cited in this standard?
 - What institutional dialogue has occurred to enhance understanding and agreement about the quality and level of its programs?
 - What criteria does the college use to decide the breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning breadth of each program it offers?
 - What role do faculty play in these decisions? How does the college use these qualities (breadth, depth, etc.) to determine that a program is collegiate or pre-collegiate level?
- d. The institution uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that reflect the diverse needs and learning styles of its students.¹
- What assessment of student learning styles has the college performed?
 - How does the institution demonstrate it is meeting the needs and learning styles of its students? What do faculty and staff know about learning needs and pedagogical approaches?
 - Do courses include multiple ways of assessing student learning? How does the college determine what delivery modes are appropriate for its students?
 - What teaching methodologies are commonly used? How are methodologies selected? Have faculty discussed the relationship between teaching methodologies and student performance? What efforts has the college made to match methodologies with particular needs of students' learning styles?
 - Has the college investigated the effectiveness of its delivery modes? How effective are delivery modes and instructional methodologies that the college uses in producing learning?
- e. The institution evaluates all courses and programs through an ongoing systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans.
- How does the college evaluate the effectiveness of its courses and programs?
 - Do criteria used in program review include relevancy, appropriateness, achievement of student learning outcomes, currency, planning for the future? Is this process consistently followed for all college programs, regardless of the type of program (collegiate, developmental, etc.)?
 - What types of data are available for program evaluation? Does the evaluation include a curricular review? Does the evaluation include a
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comprehensive review of the program role in the overall college curriculum?

- How is the relevancy of a program determined? Have student learning outcomes for the program been identified and assessed? How well are students achieving these outcomes?
 - How are results of program evaluation used in institutional planning? What changes/improvements in programs have occurred as a result of the consideration of program evaluations?
- f. The institution engages in ongoing, systematic evaluation and integrated planning to assure currency and measure achievement of its stated student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution systematically strives to improve those outcomes and makes the results available to appropriate constituencies.
- To what extent does the institution understand and participate in ongoing and integrated planning?
 - Does the college have a planning process in place? Is it cyclical, i.e., does it incorporate systematic evaluation of programs and services, improvement planning, implementation, and re-evaluation? How does college budgeting of resources follow planning?
 - To what extent are institutional data and evidence available and used for planning? Are data analyzed and interpreted for easy understanding by the college community?
- g. If an institution uses departmental course and/or program examinations, it validates their effectiveness in measuring student learning and minimizes test biases.
- How does the institution ensure the use of unbiased, valid measures of student learning?
- h. The institution awards credit based on student achievement of the course's stated learning outcomes. Units of credit awarded are consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms or equivalencies in higher education.³
- Are student learning outcomes the basis for credit awarded for courses? Are credits awarded consistent with accepted norms in higher education?
- i. The institution awards degrees and certificates based on student achievement of a program's stated learning outcomes.
- By what means does the institution ensure that achievement of stated programmatic learning outcomes are the basis for awarding degrees and certificates?

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- What institutional dialogue has occurred about the learning expected of students to earn a degree or certificate?
 - How has the college identified student learning outcomes for its degrees and certificates?
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.
- What evidence is found in the catalog of a faculty developed rationale for general education that serves as the basis for inclusion of courses in general education?
 - How are student learning outcomes used to analyze courses for inclusion as general education?
 - How is the rationale for general education communicated to all stakeholders?
 - How is the general education philosophy reflected in the degree requirements?

General education has comprehensive learning outcomes for the students who complete it, including the following:

- a. An understanding of the basic content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge: areas include the humanities and fine arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.
 - How are the basic content and methodology of traditional areas of knowledge in general education determined?
 - What process is used to ensure that general education courses include this content and methodology?
 - Do general education courses demonstrate student attainment of comprehensive student learning outcomes?
 - Do student learning outcomes for general education courses require students to understand the basic content and methodology in the major areas of knowledge? Is there a consistent process for assuring that the content and methodology are included in course outlines?
 - How well are students able to apply their understanding to subsequent coursework, employment, or other endeavors?
- b. A capability to be a productive individual and lifelong learner: skills include oral and written communication, information competency, computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis/logical thinking, and the ability to acquire knowledge through a variety of means.
 - What criteria have been developed to determine if general education students have attained these capabilities or skills?

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- What criteria does the college use to assure that the required skill level meets collegiate standards? Is there a consistent process for assuring that expected skill levels are included in course outlines? What measures of student skills are employed? Is the college satisfied that these measures are effective?
 - How well are students achieving these outcomes? How well are students able to apply these skills to subsequent coursework, employment, or other endeavors?
- c. A recognition of what it means to be an ethical human being and effective citizen: qualities include an appreciation of ethical principles; civility and interpersonal skills; respect for cultural diversity; historical and aesthetic sensitivity; and the willingness to assume civic, political, and social responsibilities locally, nationally, and globally.
- How are student learning outcomes developed to address concerns about ethics and effective citizenship? How is it determined where to include student learning leading to development of these qualities?
4. All degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established interdisciplinary core.
- Do degree programs include at least one area of focused study or 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.
- What evidence exists that students who complete vocational and occupational degrees and certificates meet employment competencies; are prepared for licensure; are prepared for certification by external agencies?
 - How does the college acquire reliable information about its students' ability to meet these requirements?
6. The institution assures that students and prospective students receive clear and accurate information about educational courses and programs and transfer policies.³ 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 outcomes consistent with those in the institution's officially approved course outline.
- How does the institution assure that information about its programs is clear and accurate? Are degrees and certificates clearly described? Are student learning outcomes included in descriptions of courses and programs?
 - How does the institution verify that students receive a course syllabus that includes student learning outcomes?

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- How does the college verify that individual sections of courses adhere to the course objectives/learning outcomes?
 - a. The institution makes available to its students clearly stated transfer-of-credit policies in order to facilitate the mobility of students without penalty. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution certifies that the expected learning outcomes for transferred courses are comparable to the learning outcomes of its own courses. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements as appropriate to its mission.⁴
 - What policies does the institution have to address transfer of coursework internally and externally and how are they communicated to students? Are these policies regularly reviewed?
 - How does the institution develop, implement, and evaluate articulation agreements?
 - b. When programs are eliminated or program requirements are significantly changed, the institution makes appropriate arrangements so that enrolled students may complete their education in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.³
 - What policy does the institution have to address elimination of, or major changes in, programs?
 - How are students advised to complete educational requirements when programs are eliminated or modified?
 - c. The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently to prospective and current students, the public and its personnel, through its catalogs, statements, and publications, including those presented in electronic formats. It regularly reviews institutional policies, procedures, and publications to assure integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.⁵
 - How does the institution conduct regular reviews of its policies and practices regarding publications to ensure their integrity? Are electronic representations of the institution regularly reviewed?
 - Does the institution provide information on student achievement to the public? Is that information accurate and current?
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 world views. These policies make clear the institution's commitment to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.
- Do board-approved policies on academic freedom exist and are they made public? Do board-approved policies on student academic honesty exist and are they made public?
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- a. Faculty distinguishes between personal conviction and professionally accepted views in a discipline. They present data and information fairly and objectively.
 - What policies demonstrate institutional commitment to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge?
 - How does the college communicate its expectation that faculty distinguish between personal conviction and professionally accepted views in a discipline? In what discussions have faculty engaged to deepen understanding of this expectation? How successfully does the faculty make this distinction in the classroom? What mechanisms does the college have for determining how effectively it is meeting this expectation?
 - b. The institution establishes and publishes clear expectations concerning student academic honesty and consequences for dishonesty.
 - What mechanism does the institution have for informing and enforcing its policies on academic honesty for students and faculty?
 - c. Institutions that require conformity to specific codes of conduct of staff, faculty, administrators, or students, or that seek to instill specific beliefs or world views, give clear prior notice of such policies, including statements in the catalog and/or appropriate faculty or student handbooks.
 - How are requirements of conformity to codes of conduct communicated?
 - If a college seeks to instill specific beliefs or world views, what policies does it have in place to detail these goals? How are the policies communicated to appropriate constituencies?
8. Institutions offering curricula in foreign locations to students other than U.S. nationals operate in conformity with standards and applicable Commission policies.²
- How well do curricula offered in foreign locations to non-U.S. students conform to the specifications of the Commission's "Policy on Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals?"

Sources of Evidence: Examples for Standard II

Listed below are examples of potential sources of evidence for Standard II. There may be many other sources relevant to each college's unique mission that institutions should provide and teams should consider.

Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

A. Instructional Programs

- Evidence that all instructional offerings align with the institution's mission regardless of where and how they are taught
- Evidence that the quality of all programs is consistently determined to meet a high standard and rigor appropriate for higher education
- Evidence of analytical reviews demonstrating that instructional programs are relevant to the interests, needs and educational goals of the students served by the institution
- Evidence students are achieving stated learning outcomes
- Evidence the institution considers how instruction is delivered and how it assesses that delivery is both appropriate and current
- Evidence of the development of student learning outcomes and strategies for attaining those outcomes at the course, program, certificate and degree level
- Evidence of assessment of student learning and program outcomes
- Evidence of assessment of student achievement data
- Evidence of institution-set standards
- Evidence of analysis of assessment results and use for improvement of student learning
- Evidence that an institutional process exists for determining the quality of all courses and programs
- Evidence that established procedures are used to develop courses and programs and that faculty play a major role in this endeavor
- Evidence of a faculty-driven assessment plan that includes systematic evaluation and integrated planning of student learning outcomes for all courses, programs, certificates, programs, and degrees
- Evidence that systematic evaluation and review of student progress toward achieving learning outcomes take place
- Evidence of the role played by advisory committees

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- Evidence instructional offerings are in appropriate areas of academic study given the institution's mission
 - Evidence programs are appropriately sequenced to provide the bases for success in subsequent courses
 - Evidence courses are of sufficient content, breadth, and length to permit the student to learn and practice expected knowledge, skills, and abilities
 - Evidence the institution concerns itself with pedagogy that addresses student needs and learning styles
 - Evidence that diverse methods of instruction are used and that students are exposed to a variety of points of view
 - Evidence of regular, systematic evaluation and review of instructional courses and programs, using consistent and valid research strategies
 - Evidence evaluation results are used for improvement
 - Evidence that elements assessed include measures of student achievement and learning
 - Evidence for an assessment plan that includes systematic evaluation and integrated planning of student learning outcomes for all courses, programs, certificates and degrees
 - Evidence that results of evaluation are communicated and disseminated
 - Evidence that results of evaluation are used for improvement
 - Evidence of a process for validating the effectiveness of examinations that assess student learning
 - Evidence that placement tests are examined for biases
 - Evidence the institution has developed a means for awarding credit based on student learning outcomes
 - Evidence that credits awarded are consistent with accepted higher education practices
 - Evidence the college uses student achievement of stated learning outcomes in awarding credit for degrees and certificates
 - Evidence that a consistent process for examining student learning outcomes is used to analyze courses for inclusion as general education
 - Evidence that the rationale for general education is communicated to students, employers, and other constituencies
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- Evidence that content and methodology is determined by appropriate discipline faculty
 - Evidence the institution has determined standards for the skills in general education
 - Evidence students who complete general education programs are proficient in general education skills
 - Evidence the program of general education includes student learning outcomes concerning values, ethics, civic responsibility, and diverse perspectives
 - Evidence that students who complete vocational and occupational degrees and certificates meet employment competencies, are prepared for certification by external agencies, are prepared for licensure
 - Evidence that clear and complete information about degrees and certificates is made available to students in publications and course syllabi
 - Evidence that transfer policies are made available to students
 - Evidence that transferred courses accepted are comparable to the college's student learning outcomes for courses
 - Evidence that articulation agreements exist and are regularly evaluated
 - Evidence students are able to complete programs that substantially change or are eliminated
 - Evidence students are advised on what they must do to complete the programs above
 - Evidence that publications and other representations of the college are regularly reviewed for clarity and accuracy
 - Evidence that institutional policies are regularly reviewed to ensure integrity
 - Evidence the institution provides the public with information about student achievement
 - Evidence of board-approved and distributed policies on academic freedom and student academic honesty
 - Evidence that the policies above are followed
 - Evidence of faculty awareness and commitment to fair and objective presentation of knowledge
 - Evidence that a college's declaration of specific world views or codes of conduct policies are clear in publications provided in advance of enrollment or employment