

SACS Principles of Institutional Effectiveness

In its *Principles of Accreditation* (2008 edition), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) Commission on Colleges (COC) has several requirements and standards that focus on institutional effectiveness. In essence, Valdosta State University must prove it complies with these standards through “systematic, ongoing, integrated, research-based reviews that result in continuous improvement” institution-wide.

The standards and requirements related to assessment are given below, along with the rationale for each given in the *SACS Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation* (2005):

2.5 The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Rationale and Notes:

Institutional effectiveness is the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring performance against mission in all aspects of an institution. The purpose of this Core Requirement is to assure that the institution has an appropriate approach to effectiveness that supports its mission. A commitment to continuous improvement is at the heart of an ongoing planning and evaluation process. It is a continuous, cyclical process that is participative, flexible, relevant, and responsive. The approach to institutional effectiveness includes all programs, services, and constituencies and is strongly linked to the decision-making process at all levels, including the institution's budgeting process.

While the requirement does not imply that all elements of the system must be undertaken simultaneously or even annually, the various activities of the institution's planning and evaluation system are scheduled at periodic intervals that make sense for the institution and its mission. The results of diverse assessment efforts can be integrated to provide a sound basis for plans aimed at institutional improvement. Because the process used for institutional effectiveness permeates *all* facets of the institution, it is appropriate that a review of this Core Requirement includes the institution's mission and effectiveness, the commitment of leadership to integrate planning and continuous improvement, and its approach to documenting the evidence of its process.

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

Note: CR 2.5, CS 3.3.1, and CS 3.4.1 all relate directly to institutional effectiveness but each addresses a different aspect. CR 2.5 requires that an institution have an effective *process* for producing improvement and accomplishing its mission. CS 3.3.1 requires that an institution identify outcomes (resulting from the process required in CR 2.5), evaluate *achievement of those outcomes*, and demonstrate improvement based on the results of that evaluation. This applies to all educational programs and all administrative and support services. CS 3.4.1 requires that each educational program offered for academic credit establish and evaluate *student learning outcomes*.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the institution's processes for systematic, ongoing, integrated, research-based reviews that result in continuous improvement?
- How does the institution demonstrate a sustained, documented history of planning evaluation cycles, including the use of results for improvement, to accomplish the institution's mission?
- Is there appropriate institutional research and budgetary support for assessment programs throughout the institution?
- What is the evidence that data from various sources concerning the effectiveness of programs and services are being used to make decisions for improvement?
- How is the institutional effectiveness process related to the budget?

- Are appropriate internal and external constituents and stakeholders involved in the planning and assessment process?

Sample Documentation:

- Evidence of linkage of institutional effectiveness to institutional mission
- Institutional plans and budgets that demonstrate the linkage of assessment findings to planning at all levels
- Minutes of appropriate unit, committee, task force meetings related to the coordination of institutional effectiveness and evidence of broad-based involvement of faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders in the institutional effectiveness process
- Documentation that relates to institutional effectiveness, such as budget preparation instructions, minutes of budget presentation meetings, annual reports, annual assessment updates, institutional effectiveness reports
- Samples of specific actions taken to improve the institutional effectiveness process and/or results from that process

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas (Institutional Effectiveness):

3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes

3.3.1.2 administrative support services

3.3.1.3 educational support services

3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate

3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate

Rationale and Notes:

This standard addresses the process of assessment that supports the institution's administrative and educational support services and serves as the cornerstone of institutional effectiveness. For academic programs and for administrative and educational support services, institutional effectiveness focuses on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning.

Note: CS 3.3.1 focuses on the full range of programs, services, and activities offered by the institution to include educational programs. CS 3.4.1 specifically requires an institution to establish and evaluate learning outcomes for each educational program for which academic credit is offered. CS 3.3.1 underscores the overarching expectation for a comprehensive approach to planning and evaluation in all aspects of an institution. (See also the note under CR 2.5)

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How are expected outcomes clearly defined in measurable terms for each educational program as well as for administrative and educational support services?
- What is the evidence of assessment activities for each educational, administrative, and educational support unit?
- What is the evidence for broad-based participation in assessment activities?
- How are periodic reviews in which programmatic outcomes such as retention, graduation rates, employer and alumni satisfaction, and the like assessed, reviewed, and used for improvements?
- How does the institution's use of assessment results improve educational programs and administrative and educational support services?

Sample Documentation:

- Documentation of goals and expected outcomes for educational programs and for administrative and educational support services
- Documentation of the evaluation of those outcomes
- Documentation of the use of the findings from assessment to improve the institution

3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.

Rationale and Notes:

The tradition of shared governance within American higher education recognizes the importance of both faculty and administrative involvement in the approval of educational programs. Approval by the faculty ensures that programs contain appropriate courses reflecting current knowledge within a discipline and that they are appropriate for the students enrolled. Approval by the administration affirms that educational programs are consistent with the mission of the institution and that the institution possesses both the organization and resources to ensure the quality of its educational programs. The expectation is that the institution will engage in ongoing planning and evaluation to ensure that, for each academic program, the institution develops and assesses student learning outcomes.

Program and learning outcomes are grounded in the faculty's knowledge of the content and coherence of the discipline as well as in the learning process and reflect expectations for performance consistent with the level of the program and the mission of the institution. Program and learning outcomes specify the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes students are expected to attain in courses or in a program. Methods for evaluating the extent to which students achieve these outcomes are appropriate to the nature of the discipline and consistent over time to enable the institution to evaluate cohorts of students who complete courses or a program. Shared widely within and across programs, the results of this evaluation can affirm the institution's success at achieving its mission and can be used to inform decisions about curricular and programmatic revisions. At appropriate intervals, program and learning outcomes and evaluation methods are evaluated and revised as appropriate.

Note: CR 2.5, CS 3.3.1, and CS 3.4.1 all relate directly to institutional effectiveness but each addresses a different aspect. CR 2.5 requires an institution to have in place an effective *process* for producing institutional improvement and for accomplishing its mission. CS 3.3.1 requires that an institution identify outcomes (resulting from the process required in CR 2.5), evaluate *achievement of those outcomes*, and *demonstrate improvement* based on the results of that evaluation. This applies to all educational programs and all administrative and support services. CS 3.4.1 requires that each educational program offered for academic credit establish and evaluate *student learning outcomes*.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the process for developing and approving educational programs and who is responsible?
- What are the program and learning outcomes for all educational programs, including majors, minors, general education and other institution-wide programs, including distance-learning programs?
- How has the institution evaluated the extent to which students are achieving expected outcomes?
- How has the institution used the results of evaluating student achievement?
- What evidence exists that the institution has established student learning outcomes in all settings, including distance learning, and that they are assessed within the institutional mission?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and procedures for approving educational programs
- Minutes from faculty and administrative meetings
- Representative examples of program and learning outcomes for each educational program.
- Descriptions of methods for evaluating student achievement of these outcomes
- Reports of the results of evaluation, examples of how the results have been used for program improvement, and examples of how methods of evaluation have been improved over time

3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them. (College-level competencies)

Rationale and Notes:

Since the general education core is central to educational programs, this standard assumes that the institution will define specifically which competencies are appropriate to the goals of its general education program and consistent with principles of good practice. The institution is responsible for identifying measures to ensure that students have attained those competencies.

Note: This standard addresses college-level competencies within the general education core; it does not require a specific course to address each competency.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the specific college-level competencies within the general education program?
- What evidence is available to show that students have attained these competencies?
- How does the institution demonstrate that it identifies competencies that are college-level?

Sample Documentation:

- Identification of competencies
- Documentation of justification for defining and evaluating the college-level general education competencies
- Evidence that graduates of undergraduate degree programs have attained the college-level competencies

Sources:

Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2005).

Resource manual for the principles of accreditation: Foundations for quality enhancement. Retrieved from www.sacscoc.org/pdf/PrinciplesOfAccreditation.PDF, pp. 9-10, 34-37.

Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2008).

Principles of accreditation: Foundations for quality enhancement. Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008%20Interim%20Principles%20108.pdf>, p. 14.