

Higher Education Associations: AACC, AASCU, ACE, AAU, APLU, NAICU
Regional Accrediting Commissions: MSCHE, NEASC-CIHE, NCA-HLC, NWCCU, SACS, WASC-ACCJC, WASC-ACSCU

Principles for Effective Assessment of Student Achievement

July 19, 2013

The undersigned national higher education associations and regional accrediting commissions have endorsed the attached statement, “Principles for Effective Assessment of Student Achievement.” The statement grew out of a meeting of the presidents of the seven regional accrediting commissions and public and private university provosts. The statement is intended to emphasize the need to assess effectively student achievement, and the importance of conducting such assessments in ways that are congruent with the institution’s mission.

We hope that colleges and universities will find this statement useful in evaluating their assessment policies and procedures and that accrediting commissions similarly will find the statement helpful in evaluating their assessment standards. Looking ahead, we believe that the shared principles of this consensus statement can facilitate continued cooperation and collaboration between these two allied sectors of the higher education community.

Higher Education Associations:

*American Association of Community Colleges
(AACC)*

*American Association of State Colleges and
Universities (AASCU)*

American Council on Education (ACE)

Association of American Universities (AAU)

*Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
(APLU)*

*National Association of Independent Colleges and
Universities (NAICU)*

Regional Accrediting Commissions:

*Middle States Commission on Higher Education
(MSCHE)*

*New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
(NEASC-CIHE)*

*North Central Association of Colleges and Schools,
The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC)*

*Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
(NWCCU)*

*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges (SACS)*

*Western Association of Schools and Colleges –
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior
Colleges (WASC-ACCJC)*

*Western Association of Schools and Colleges -
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and
Universities (WASC-ACSCU)*

July 2013

Principles for Effective Assessment of Student Achievement

Federal law requires that a higher education institution undergoing accreditation provide evidence of “success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution’s mission.” Both aspects of this requirement—the insistence upon achievement, and the tailoring to institutional mission—are critically important. The demonstration of quality is a fundamental responsibility of all colleges and universities, but both the kinds of quality and the methods used to measure it will differ depending on the mission of the institution.

More specifically, though the exact content of these criteria and the methods for measuring them will differ, all institutions should be expected to provide evidence of success in three domains:

1. Evidence of the student learning experience. Institutions should be able to define and evaluate *how* their students are learning: more specifically, institutions should be able to describe the kinds of experiences that they expect students to have inside and outside the classroom. Relevant evidence may pertain to targets for the kinds of reading and writing assignments that students should complete; levels of personal interaction with faculty members; residential and/or co-curricular components of the learning experience, and other learning experiences that the institution deems relevant to its mission.
2. Evaluation of student academic performance. Institutions should be able to define meaningful curricular goals, and they must have defensible standards for evaluating whether students are achieving those goals. Appropriate methods for the assessment of student work may include, among other approaches, meaningful and rigorous faculty evaluation and grading or external benchmarking.
3. Post-graduation outcomes. Institutions should be able to articulate how they prepare students consistently with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives, and, where appropriate, further education. They should collect and provide data about whether they are meeting these goals. Relevant kinds of data may include completion rates, job placement rates, levels of post-graduation civic participation, kinds of jobs and vocations chosen, surveys pertaining to alumni satisfaction and success, and data on other post-graduation goals relevant to the institution’s mission.

The accreditation process needs to allow institutions flexibility with regard to the methods for measuring progress toward these goals. It is a mistake to conflate particular means for measuring goals with the achievement of those goals. Measures of all kinds will work best if they are integrated into the teaching and administration of colleges and universities, analyzed on a regular basis, and summarized in the accreditation process.

###