CHARACTERISTICS *of*
EXCELLENCE
in HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUIREMENTS OF AFFILIATION AND STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

CHE
MSA

Middle States Commission on Higher Education
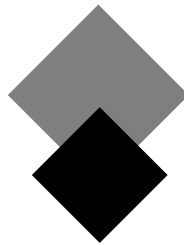
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Introduction

An institution of higher education is a community dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, to the study and clarification of values, and to the advancement of the society it serves. To support these goals, institutions of higher education within the Middle States region joined together in 1919 to form the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, a professional association devoted to educational improvement through accreditation. Today's successor organization for higher education accreditation is the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Accreditation is the means of self-regulation and peer review adopted by the educational community. The accrediting process is intended to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity of higher education, making it worthy of public confidence and minimizing the scope of external control. The extent to which each educational institution accepts and fulfills the responsibilities inherent in the process is a measure of its concern for freedom and quality in higher education and its commitment to striving for and achieving excellence in its endeavors.

Middle States' accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. Based upon the results of institutional review by peers and colleagues assigned by the Commission, accreditation attests to the judgment of the Commission on Higher Education that an institution has met the following criteria:

- that it has a mission appropriate to higher education;
- that it is guided by well-defined and appropriate goals, including goals for student learning;
- that it has established conditions and procedures under which its mission and goals can be realized;
- that it assesses both institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes, and uses the results for improvement;
- that it is accomplishing its mission and goals substantially;
- that it is organized, staffed, and supported so that it can be expected to continue to accomplish its mission and goals; and
- that it meets the Requirements of Affiliation and accreditation standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Membership in the Middle States Association follows a period of candidacy lasting up to five years. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education reviews institutions periodically through either on-site evaluation or other reports. Accreditation is continued only as a result of periodic reviews and evaluations through assessments of institutional achievements.

Characteristics of Excellence is designed as a guide for those institutions considering application for membership, those accepted as candidate institutions, and those accredited institutions engaged in self-review and peer evaluation. In their self-review processes, institutions demonstrate how they meet these accreditation standards within the context of their own institutional mission and goals. No assurance is given or implied that every accredited institution manifests these characteristics and meets these standards in equal proportion. Accredited institutions are expected to demonstrate these standards in substantial measure, to conduct their activities in a manner consistent with the standards, and to engage in ongoing processes of self-review and improvement.

Characteristics of Excellence 2002

Among the principles that guided the development of these standards, three are particularly noteworthy. First, these standards place an emphasis on institutional assessment and assessment of student learning. Second, the standards acknowledge the diversity of educational delivery systems that enable institutions to meet accreditation standards. And third, in order to achieve appropriate specificity, the standards are clearly defined and illustrated, including examples of evidence that could substantiate an institution's achievement of the standards.

The emphasis on institutional and student learning assessment follows naturally from the Commission's long-standing commitment to outcomes assessment, as evidenced historically through its publications, workshops, and training programs. Nonetheless, the Commission is aware of the institutional effort and cultural change that the relative emphasis on assessment may require.

The Commission on Higher Education acknowledges that in order to meet these standards, institutions will be called upon to commit resources to the tasks of research and analysis, particularly as related to the assessment and improvement of teaching and learning.

These standards affirm that the individual mission and goals of each institution remain the context within which these accreditation standards are applied during self-study and evaluation. The standards emphasize functions rather than specific structures, recognizing that there are many different models for educational and operational excellence.

The particular way in which a standard is evidenced may vary, consistent with differences in institutional mission and purpose. In addition, some standards (particularly 12: General Education and 13: Related Educational Activities) may not apply fully or at all to some institutions. The standard on General Education, for example, might not be especially relevant for an institution that only offers graduate degree programs. Similarly, the "Related Educational Activities"

contained in Standard 13 are to be addressed only as they relate to individual institutions.

Although *Characteristics of Excellence* incorporates 14 individual standards, these standards should be viewed as an interrelated whole. The order is not intended to suggest relative importance or priority. The first seven standards address Institutional Context, and the second seven focus on Educational Effectiveness. Consistent with the intended emphasis on assessment, each of these two sections concludes with a related assessment standard (Standard 7: Institutional Assessment and Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning). The effectiveness of an institution rests upon the contribution that each of the institution's programs and services makes toward achieving the goals of the institution as a whole. Standards 7 and 14 build upon the preceding standards, each of which includes periodic assessment of effectiveness or student learning as one of its fundamental elements.

Format and Application

To achieve clarity of presentation, the following format has been used for the 14 standards for accreditation:

Standard

The individual standard is expressed in one or two sentences. The standard is followed by narrative text, under the heading "Context," that addresses the topic of the standard, its context and values; provides guidance and definition; and builds a bridge to the Fundamental Elements. The narrative is not considered to be part of the actual standard.

Fundamental Elements

The Fundamental Elements are an explication of the standard, and, as such, they specify the particular characteristics or qualities that together constitute, comprise, and encompass the standard. Institutions and evaluators will use these elements, within the context of institutional mission, to demonstrate or determine compliance with the standard. Institutions will utilize the Fundamental Elements, along with the Standards, as a guide to their self-study processes.

The Fundamental Elements specified for each standard have an inherent relationship to each other, and collectively these elements constitute compliance. In light of this, neither the institution nor evaluators should use the Fundamental Elements as a simple checklist. Both the institution and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by these elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Where an institution does not demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

Much of the evidence or analysis an institution will present to demonstrate that it meets the accreditation standards is clear and inherent within the Fundamental Elements themselves. Optional Analysis and Evidence, the final section of each standard, provides additional examples of documentation and analyses that might be carried out by an institution, relative to the particular accreditation standard.

Each institution will determine whether its self-study processes and report may be strengthened by incorporating some of these analyses and resources. The list is not comprehensive but is provided for use, as deemed appropriate, by the institution. It is not intended for independent utilization by the evaluation team, and institutions are not required to provide the information listed. Institutions should make reasonable choices regarding representative, useful sampling of evidence in any suggested category.

Relevant to each standard and its fundamental elements, institutions are encouraged to incorporate other types of assessment and analysis particular to their mission, goals, programs, and structures, including assessment documents prepared for other accrediting or regulatory agencies.

Interpreting and Applying the Standards

Judgment is important in applying *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*. Although the 2002 revision was formatted so that each Standard is followed by separate sections for "Context," "Fundamental Elements," and "Optional Analysis and Evidence," institutions and teams should remember to consider the spirit of the institution and the spirit of the accreditation standards as a whole, rather than applying these specific statements and "fundamental elements" piecemeal.

Institutions that elect the "selected topics" type of self-study demonstrate compliance with those standards or parts of standards not included in the Selected Topics self-study report through a separate review of documents prior to the team visit. Careful coordination is necessary to ensure that compliance is demonstrated either in the self study and visit, or in the documents reviewed in advance. (Please see Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report for an explanation of the self-study models.)

If an institution has elected to organize its self-study process and report according to topics that it finds are most useful, rather than tracking the order of the accreditation standards, the team may choose to follow that organization in offering suggestions for improvement in the team report and may determine compliance with accreditation standards by using information diffused throughout the self-study document.

Whatever the type and organization of the self-study, compliance with each standard and with the standards as a whole will require interpretation by evaluators. For example:

1. Mission: Each standard should be interpreted and applied in the context of the institution's mission and situation.

2. Integrated Whole vs. Checklist: Evaluators must consider the totality created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists.

3. "Context" Sections: Not all parts of every statement in the Context sections will apply to every institution.

4. All Evidence: Information gathered during team visits may be used to supplement or contradict information included in the self-study.

5. Common Sense: Are the team's conclusions consistent with each other, with the self-study, and with information gathered during the visit? Does its report reflect understanding of this particular institution and its goals?

Standards at a Glance

Institutional Context

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Educational Effectiveness

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

Requirements of Affiliation

To be eligible for Candidacy status, Initial Accreditation or Reaffirmation of Accreditation, an institution must demonstrate that it meets or continues to meet the following Requirements of Affiliation of the Commission on Higher Education. (All terminology is used as defined within the accreditation standards.) Once eligibility is established, institutions then must demonstrate that they meet the standards for accreditation.

1. The institution awards postsecondary degrees. Institutions that offer only postsecondary certificates, diplomas, or licenses are not eligible for accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

2. The institution is able to provide written documentation that it is authorized to operate as an educational institution and award postsecondary degrees by an appropriate governmental organization within the Middle States region (Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), as well as by other agencies as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.

It should be noted that:
- Authorization to operate as a corporation is different from, and does not necessarily guarantee, authorization to offer postsecondary degrees. The latter is **required** for MSCHE accreditation.

- Government licensure requirements often differ significantly from Commission accreditation standards, and government licensure does not guarantee that an institution meets Commission standards.

3. The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree programs. It will graduate at least one class before the evaluation team visit for initial accreditation takes place (Step 7 of the initial accreditation process), unless the institution can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commission that the lack of graduates does not compromise its ability to demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes.

4. The institution's representatives are able to communicate with the Commission in English, both orally and in writing.

5. The institution complies with all applicable government (usually Federal and state) policies, regulations, and requirements.

6. The institution complies with applicable Commission interregional and inter-institutional policies. These policies can be viewed on the Commission website, www.msche.org.

7. Institutional planning integrates plans for academic, personnel, information resources and technologies, learning resources, and financial development.

8. The institution has documented financial resources, funding base, and plans for financial development adequate to support its educational purposes and programs and to assure financial stability. The institution devotes a sufficient portion of its income to the support of its educational purposes and programs.

9. The institution's governing body is responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. It is prepared to declare, in writing, that the institution will make freely available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations.

10. The institution has a core of faculty with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's programs.

Standards for Accreditation

Institutional Context

Standard 1

Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Context

The mission, developed by broad representation from all sectors of the institution and formally ratified by its primary governing body, defines the institution, delineates the scope of the institution, explains the institution's character and individuality, and articulates values as appropriate. The institution's basic purposes and characteristics, such as research or community service, should be addressed within the statement of mission. The mission may be accompanied by related statements, such as a statement of institutional philosophy.

In addition to the mission, an effective institution has clearly articulated written statements of key institutional goals, which may be expressed within a statement of institutional vision or a separate document. Although institutions may use different terminology, the Commission on Higher Education interprets goals to define an endpoint or characteristic that might describe the institution.

Institutional goals:

> ➤ stem from the institution's mission;

> ➤ are developed with the involvement of the institution's community;

> ➤ are based on a review of existing goals and an analysis of internal and external forces affecting the institution; and

➢ provide a framework for ongoing institutional development and self-evaluation.

Institutional goals are ideally expressed as outcomes: how the institution, its constituents and members, and the community it is committed to serving, will be different as a result of its initiatives and undertakings. Educational goals should be stated in terms of the outcomes they seek to achieve (e.g., the academic and personal changes and/or competencies the institution seeks to foster in its students). Institutional goals are also best expressed in observable terms to ensure that they are capable of being evaluated through institutional assessment (see Standard 7: Institutional Assessment). Goals should be sufficiently flexible for the institution to be able to respond to internal and external opportunities and changes, including emerging academic disciplines, changes within disciplines, and the use of new instructional methods and technologies.

As stated in Standard 2, the institutional objectives or strategies are activities, initiatives, or undertakings that institutions might conduct in order to achieve a goal. The Commission expects that institutions will define the goal (the broader end point), as well as the objectives or strategies (the path to achieve the goal).

While an institution is expected to aspire to excellence, it also is expected to operate within realistic goals reflective of its mission and its financial, human, and physical resources. Moreover, mission and goals are most effective when they are part of an institution-wide effort to improve and integrate the activities and operations of all elements and aspects of the institution. As an institution continually evaluates itself and improves, it should continue to review its mission and keep it current.

Fundamental Elements of Mission and Goals

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ clearly defined mission and goals that:

    ○ guide faculty, administration, staff and governing bodies in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curriculum development, and definition of program outcomes;

    ○ include support of scholarly and creative activity, at levels and of the kinds appropriate to the institution's purposes and character;

    ○ are developed through collaborative participation by those who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional improvement and developments;

    ○ are periodically evaluated and formally approved;

    ○ are publicized and widely known by the institution's members;

➢ mission and goals that relate to external as well as internal contexts and constituencies;

➢ institutional goals that are consistent with mission; and

> ➤ goals that focus on student learning, other outcomes, and institutional improvement.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

> ➤ evidence of written public statements to faculty, students, and other constituencies on the chief executive's vision for the institution;

> ➤ analysis of how institutional goals are applied at different levels within the institution and how the implementation of goals is coordinated;

> ➤ analysis of the processes used to develop goals and for the periodic review of mission and goals; or

> ➤ review of policies and processes used to disseminate mission and goals to new faculty, staff, students and members of the governing body and efforts intended to maintain awareness and commitment to that mission among continuing members of these groups.

Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Context

The willingness to seek improved approaches, determine the efficacy of something previously untried, test hypotheses, and resist complacency is a sign of institutional vigor. An accredited institution uses the results of planning and assessment to maintain, support, and improve its programs and services.

An effective institution is one in which growth, development, and change are the result of a thoughtful and rational process of self-examination and planning, and one in which such a process is an inherent part of ongoing activities. The nature and quality of planning are among the basic indicators of institutional strength. At its best, institutional planning stimulates imaginative and creative proposals and approaches for strengthening the institution.

All institutions face the continuous challenge of finding a balance among its own goals, the expectations of governments and other organizations to whom they are accountable, and available financial and other resources. At the same time that an institution strives to meet its stated purposes, it must remain flexible enough to respond to the dynamic environment in which it exists. Adequate planning processes, coupled with strategic thinking and clear mission statements, allow an institution to continue to meet its purposes while supporting the opportunity for change and renewal.

Institutional planning is a disciplined, coordinated, systematic, and sustained effort to achieve the institution's mission and goals through decisions and actions that shape and guide what the institution is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. The planning process helps an institution to manage efficiently, maintain fiscal control, improve services and processes, and allocate resources effectively (i.e., assign the right resource to a particular project, ensure full utilization of the resource, and prioritize projects to eliminate conflicts on the use of resources).

The starting point for institutional planning, as discussed under Standard 1 (Mission and Goals), is the development of clearly articulated written statements of its key institutional goals, expressed in observable terms. As they develop goals, institutions should consider both internal and external forces affecting the institution, perhaps including trends and projections for enrollment, resources and funding, employer expectations, inflationary or recessionary pressures, and competition for faculty and students, among other factors.

The next step of institutional planning is the planning and implementation of intentionally designed objectives or strategies—programs, services, and initiatives—to achieve the mission and goals. While goals represent the institution's intended destination, objectives or strategies articulate the path to that destination; they are the steps or activities that lead to the achievement of institutional goals. An institution might, for example, have a goal of providing modern educational facilities for its students, and it will achieve this goal through several objectives or strategies, including completing a capital campaign and updating its facilities master plan. Another institution might have a goal of graduating a high proportion of the students it admits, and it might plan to achieve this goal through a number of objectives or strategies, including developing a first-year experience program and making academic advising more responsive to student needs. As with goals (see Standard 1: Mission and Goals), objectives or strategies are ideally expressed as observable outcomes and are sufficiently flexible for the institution to be able to respond to opportunities and changes.

Appropriate interrelationships among institutional, operational, and unit-level goals should be evident. Some goals may be shared across units, and some institutional goals may be syntheses of unit-level goals.

When developing goals and objectives at the institutional and unit-levels, quality is more important than quantity. A few well-conceived goals that address identified priorities will engage, unite, and inspire the institutional community, while a long "laundry list" of goals may cause the institutional community to lose focus and diffuse its energies. Likewise, the institution should be careful not to establish so many objectives or strategies (activities to achieve the goal) that its resources and energies are too diffuse to perform any one strategy or objective well. The process of honing many possible goals and the objectives or strategies to achieve them down to a few essential ones is valuable, as it generates critical discussions throughout the institutional community about institutional values and priorities.

The planning process is a coordinated effort that involves representatives of all affected parts of the institution who give a holistic consideration to all institutional goals. Concurrent with the development and implementation of objectives or strategies to achieve mission and goals is the intentional deployment of resources to achieve them, and thus the planning process also aims to promote coordination of resources, prioritization of goals based on resources available, and resolution of resource conflicts or insufficient resources.

Institutions often have a variety of plans, including not only an institutional (strategic) plan but also an academic plan, financial plan, enrollment plan, capital facilities master plan, and technology plan. At many institutions, effective institutional planning begins with the academic plan, which informs the

other plans, along with unit-level (campus, division, department, program, etc.) plans. All plans should be interrelated; if the enrollment plan, for example, calls for increased enrollment, the capital facilities master plan should ensure that institutional facilities can accommodate the increase in the student body. Academic planning often is facilitated by a process of academic program review, in which current academic programs are reviewed for their quality, demand, cost-effectiveness, and centrality to mission. The results of the review are then used to develop academic program plans.

As discussed under Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment), an effective planning process also includes assessment: a thorough review of relevant quantitative and qualitative information drawn from all segments of the institutional community. Its purposes are to determine if institutional and unit level mission and goals are being achieved, to understand why they have or have not been achieved, to evaluate whether institutional resources are being allocated and used in accordance with the priorities established by the institutional mission and goals, and to determine if the quality and quantity of resources allocated for the achievement of each institutional goal is appropriate. An assessment also is undertaken of the planning process itself to determine whether its purposes have been achieved.

As also discussed under Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment), the result of an effective planning process is institutional renewal. An assessment plan may thus be an important component of a collection of institutional plans both because it helps promote attention to the goals of the other plans and because the use of assessment results to inform the other plans ensures that disappointing outcomes are appropriately addressed. The Commission expects a thorough review of assessment information to lead to either confirmation of current goals, plans, and programs and services, or the appropriate modification of them to reflect the changing needs of the institution and its community. Institutional renewal involves the entire community and cannot be addressed in isolation.

Fundamental Elements of Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

> ➢ goals and objectives or strategies, both institution-wide and for individual units that are clearly stated, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, are linked to mission and goal achievement, and are used for planning and resource allocation at the institutional and unit levels;

> ➢ planning and improvement processes that are clearly communicated, provide for constituent participation, and incorporate the use of assessment results;

> ➢ well defined decision-making processes and authority that facilitates planning and renewal;

➢ the assignment of responsibility for improvements and assurance of accountability;

➢ a record of institutional and unit improvement efforts and their results; and

➢ periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence that planning processes are continuous and systematic;

➢ analysis of the institutional culture for planning, including:

  ○ faculty and administrators' understanding of their roles in the planning process;

  ○ campus-wide efforts to encourage, recognize, and value efforts to engage in planning and institutional renewal;

➢ analysis of the quality and usefulness of institutional support for planning efforts, including the quality and usefulness of any of the following that may be developed to promote and guide planning activities:

  ○ written statements of expectations for goals, and plans, and the process for planned institutional change;

  ○ policies and governance structures to support institutional planning;

  ○ administrative support for planning activities;

  ○ professional development opportunities and resources for faculty and staff to learn about planning;

➢ analysis of the degree to which academic planning stems from academic program review and drives the development of other functional plans (financial, enrollment, facilities, technology) and unit-level plans;

➢ evidence of program review used to change and improve educational programs, consistent with institutional values, purpose, and goals [included also under Optional Analysis and Evidence in Standard 11: Educational Offerings];

➢ evidence of environmental scans and other processes in place for evaluating the economic, political, and social climate in which the institution operates and expects to operate;

➢ review of resource allocation procedures and their relationship to planning, mission, goals, and objectives [included also under Standard 3 Optional Analyses];

➢ assessment of the work of institutional committees, including the governing body, responsible for planning, assessment, and budget activities [Included also under Optional Analyses in Standard 3];

➢ review of external affiliations and partnerships and of their impact on the climate in which the institution operates;

➢ evidence of renewal strategies, rationales for changes made, and anticipated impact [Included also under Optional Analyses in Standard 7];

➢ assessment of resources utilized for institutional improvement;

➢ analysis of best practice models and benchmarks applied to improvement efforts; or

➢ evidence of quality improvement activities.

Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Context

The effective use of institutional resources, internal and external, is crucial to institutional performance. While for some institutions, a significant portion of available resources is generated and monitored at the system level, institutional management of resource acquisition and utilization significantly contributes to the effectiveness of planning, goals achievement, mission success, and institutional integrity. Institutional support resources including financial, facilities, equipment and supplies, technology, research and instructional support and staffing, and other assets should be an integral and proportional part of all institutional planning, allocation, and assessment activities.

The allocation of resources among programs, units, and individuals is an indicator of institutional priorities. Thus, the decision-making process for allocating assets should be connected to the institutional planning process; and the plan itself should provide a method for thoroughly reviewing, analyzing and monitoring all institutional support. Measures of efficiency and effectiveness, supported by quantitative and/or qualitative analyses related to mission and goals, may prove useful in the planning process. These measures may be among the significant types of information to be reported, at the system or institutional level as appropriate, in initial and continuing self-assessment and peer review for accreditation.

The efficient and effective use of institutional resources requires sound financial planning linked to institutional goals and strategies. These goals and strategies that support the institution's mission and require continual assessment of financial performance against the financial plan. The institution should demonstrate through an analysis of financial data and its financial plan that it has sufficient financial resources and a financial plan to carry out its mission and execute its plans, and if necessary, a realistic plan to implement corrective action to strengthen the institution financially within an acceptable time period.

Institutions should be prepared to provide financial data for the two most recently completed fiscal years and a financial plan covering at least two additional years. A typical financial plan will include a forecast of revenues, expenses, and investment income, and where available, a statement of financial position at the end of the fiscal year. For publicly traded institutions and their affiliates, this includes public filings.

Fundamental Elements of Institutional Resources

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ strategies to measure and assess the level of, and efficient utilization of, institutional resources required to support the institution's mission and goals;

➢ rational and consistent policies and procedures in place to determine allocation of assets;

➢ an allocation approach that ensures adequate faculty, staff, and administration to support the institution's mission and outcomes expectations;

➢ a financial planning and budgeting process aligned with the institution's mission, goals, and plan that provides for an annual budget and multi-year budget projections, both institution-wide and among departments; utilizes planning and assessment documents; and addresses resource acquisition and allocation for the institution and any subsidiary, affiliated, or contracted educational organizations as well as for institutional systems as appropriate;

➢ a comprehensive infrastructure or facilities master plan and facilities/infrastructure life-cycle management plan, as appropriate to mission, and evidence of implementation;

➢ recognition in the comprehensive plan that facilities, such as learning resources fundamental to all educational and research programs and the library, are adequately supported and staffed to accomplish the institution's objectives for student learning, both on campuses and at a distance;

➢ an educational and other equipment acquisition and replacement process and plan, including provision for current and future technology, as appropriate to the educational programs and support services, and evidence of implementation;

➢ adequate institutional controls to deal with financial, administrative and auxiliary operations, and rational and consistent policies and procedures in place to determine allocation of assets;

➢ an annual independent audit confirming financial responsibility, with evidence of follow-up on any concerns cited in the audit's accompanying management letter; and

➤ periodic assessment of the effective and efficient use of institutional resources.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➤ evidence of cooperative agreements for inter-institutional collaboration and resource sharing; analyses of any resulting efficiencies and impact on student achievement of academic goals;

➤ analysis of environmental scan data and other information the institution has gathered regarding its external environment, and the implications for developing linkages with other institutions, businesses, and other organizations rather than duplicating programs or services;

➤ evidence demonstrating the systemic approach that the institution utilizes to improve efficiency, contain costs, re-direct resources and develop new revenue streams to support the institution's mission and goals;

➤ review of institutional fund raising and grant activities;

➤ review of plans and policies for endowment management to ensure consistency with the institution's financial resources, goals, and objectives and summaries of endowment performance;

➤ review of financial statements for affiliated organizations;

➤ review of comprehensive institution resource acquisition, planning, assessment, and budget reports;

➤ assessment of the work of institutional committees, including the governing body, responsible for planning, assessment, and budget activities [Included also under Optional Analyses in Standard 2];

➤ review of resource allocation procedures and their relationship to planning, mission, goals, and objectives [Included also under Optional Analyses in Standard 2];

➤ evidence of new or adapted strategies to enhance institutional support; or assessment of the work of institutional committees—including the governing body, finance, or audit committees—responsible for planning, assessment, and budget activities [Included also under Optional Analyses in Standard 2].

Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Context

The primary goal of governance is to enable an educational entity to realize fully its stated mission and goals and to achieve these in the most effective and efficient manner that benefits the institution and its students. Institutional governance provides the means through which authority and responsibility are assigned, delegated, and shared in a climate of mutual support and respect.

The Commission on Higher Education expects a climate of shared collegial governance in which all constituencies (such as faculty, administration, staff, students and governing board members, as determined by each institution) involved in carrying out the institution's mission and goals participate in the governance function in a manner appropriate to that institution. Institutions should seek to create a governance environment in which issues concerning mission, vision, program planning, resource allocation and others, as appropriate, can be discussed openly by those who are responsible for each activity. Within any system of shared governance, each major constituency must carry out its separate but complementary roles and responsibilities. Each must contribute to an appropriate degree so that decision-makers and goal-setters consider information from all relevant constituencies. While reflecting institutional mission, perspective, and culture, collegial governance structures should acknowledge also the need for timely decision-making.

The governance structure should provide for a governing body with sufficient independence and expertise to assure the academic integrity of the institution and for a chief executive officer, appointed by the governing body, whose primary responsibility is to lead the institution toward the achievement of its goals.

In some institutions such as corporate universities or subsidiaries or divisions of larger institutions, the term governing body may include a separate governing board and a fiduciary board. Whatever the title—board, directors, trustees, governors, or regents—the governing body is ultimately accountable for the

academic quality, fiscal and academic integrity, academic planning, assets, and financial health of the institution. It should review institutional assessment results and participate in institutional planning. However, it should not manage, micro manage, or interfere in the day-to-day operation of the institution. Always the advocate, and when necessary, the defender of the institution, the governing body is responsible for the institution's integrity and quality.

It is often the role of the governing body to oversee at the policy level the quality of teaching and learning, to approve degree programs and the awarding of degrees, to establish personnel policies and procedures (including salary schedules), to conduct or to direct the conduct of collective bargaining agreements where appropriate, to encourage research, and to approve policies and by-laws. If so provided in its structure, the governing body also may confirm appointments of leading academic and administrative officers.

In financial affairs, the members of the governing body should confine themselves, as they do in academic matters, to a basic policy-making role, ensuring strong financial management by holding the chief executive officer responsible and accountable for internal operation. The governing body is responsible for the financial integrity of the accredited entity. The governing body, through the chief executive officer, receives periodic reports of institutional committees and campus constituencies and, when not a system matter, receives reports from auditors. The chief executive officer and the governing body should seek opportunities to stabilize and control costs, as well as opportunities to advocate actively for external support. The members of the governing body also should assist in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution, as appropriate.

Governing body members, regardless of how appointed, have primary responsibility to the accredited institution and should not allow political or other influences to interfere with governing body duties. Consistent with institutional mission and sponsorship, members should represent different points of view, interests, and experiences as well as diversity in characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Governing body composition should attempt to reflect student body profiles.

Members of the governing body act with authority only as a collective entity. Governing body members of higher education institutions normally have no financial interest in the institution. In cases where financial interests may exist, such as remuneration of board members or contractual relationships, the members of the governing body should be able to demonstrate that those interests do not outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution. Although higher education institutions rarely provide remuneration for governing body service, reasonable compensation may be appropriate, for example, when responsibilities are particularly time-consuming, when legal requirements make service unusually demanding, or when compensation is needed to ensure a level of governing body expertise. Such compensation should be based on the functions required and performed and on the skill and experience of members of the governing body.

While the general description of the role of the governing body applies best to a free-standing institution, many institutions have different governance structures that depart in specific ways from this model. Examples of such institutions include individual units within a system, public institutions whose governing bodies' decisions are subject to review by a higher-level board or administrative agency, religious institutions whose governing bodies are obliged to follow direction provided by a sponsoring religious organization, some proprietary institutions, and educational units of organizations whose primary business is not education and whose leaders are responsible to corporate boards. In all of these circumstances, the roles and powers of the governing body and of any higher or other related authorities should be explicitly stated in the institution's charter, articles of incorporation, enabling statute, by-laws, or other documents.

In a multiple-unit system, the governing body should clearly establish relationships and carefully balance the interests of the units with those of the total system. This may be done through a variety of structures including local representation on the system board or through local advisory councils that address unit issues.

The governing body of a proprietary institution is the legally constituted body that serves the public interest by seeing that the institution clearly states and fulfills its announced mission and goals and by ensuring its continuity and fiscal and academic integrity.

A manifestation of a governing body's responsibility is its willingness to assess its own effectiveness periodically. Additionally, the governing body should orient new group members to the mission, organization, and academic environment of the institution to assure that all members understand their role in the governance structure.

One of the major responsibilities of the governing body is to select, determine compensation for, and evaluate the chief executive officer and, in some cases, other major members of the executive management structure charged with the operations of the institution. The governing body also has responsibility to plan appropriately for transitions in institutional leadership. There are multiple models of selecting a chief executive officer, some of which may allow for the participation of faculty or other major constituencies. It is the governing body's responsibility to ensure that the selection process is established, published, and followed.

Once this selection has taken place and the individual has been installed, the governing body is expected to support the chief executive officer in the conduct of the duties necessary to fulfill the mission of the institution through the executive officer's oversight of faculty, administration, and staff. In a similar fashion, the governing body should assist the executive officers by helping them resist pressures from individuals or groups outside the established governance structure of the institution that threaten to impede the fulfillment of institutional mission and goals.

Fundamental Elements of Leadership and Governance

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ a well-defined system of collegial governance including written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty and readily available to the campus community;

- ➢ written governing documents, such as a constitution, by-laws, enabling legislation, charter or other similar documents, that:

  - ○ delineate the governance structure and provide for collegial governance, and the structure's composition, duties and responsibilities. In proprietary, corporate and similar types of institutions, a separate document may establish the duties and responsibilities of the governing body as well as the selection process;

  - ○ assign authority and accountability for policy development and decision making, including a process for the involvement of appropriate institutional constituencies in policy development and decision making;

  - ○ provide for the selection process for governing body members;

- ➢ appropriate opportunity for student input regarding decisions that affect them;

- ➢ a governing body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest and of an appropriate size to fulfill all its responsibilities, and which includes members with sufficient expertise to assure that the body's fiduciary responsibilities can be fulfilled;

- ➢ a governing body not chaired by the chief executive officer;

- ➢ a governing body that certifies to the Commission that the institution is in compliance with the Requirements of Affiliation, accreditation standards and policies of the Commission; describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting and regulatory agencies; communicates any changes in its accredited status; and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities, including levels of governing body compensation, if any;

- ➢ a conflict of interest policy for the governing body (and fiduciary body members, if such a body exists), which addresses matters such as remuneration, contractual relationships, employment, family, financial or other interests that could pose conflicts of interest, and that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution;

- ➢ a governing body that assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution;

- a process for orienting new members and providing continuing updates for current members of the governing body on the institution's mission, organization, and academic programs and objectives;
- a procedure in place for the periodic objective assessment of the governing body in meeting stated governing body objectives;
- a chief executive officer, appointed by the governing board, with primary responsibility to the institution; and
- periodic assessment of the effectiveness of institutional leadership and governance.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- review of written policies, and evidence of implementation, that describe the processes for involvement of the governing body, administration, and faculty in policy development and decision making, specifically with respect to selection and evaluation of the chief executive officer or those in charge of operational/executive responsibilities; budgeting and resource development; oversight of the academic program; consultation regarding faculty hiring, dismissal, promotion and tenure; and monitoring operations of the institution;
- review of written policies regarding situations defined by the institution as conflicts of interest, such as the presence of paid staff on the governing body;
- review of handbooks for members of the governing body, administrators, faculty members and other employees to ensure that they provide adequate information regarding job descriptions and role and responsibilities in governance;
- evidence and plans for governing body orientation and self-assessment;
- assessment of written records of external specialists invited to the institution for consultation on planning and self-assessment issues;
- review of written records to assess the carrying out of responsibilities by the governing body and its committees consistent with the institutional mission and its definition of appropriate participation by internal institutional bodies, evidence of faculty council/senate or similar body deliberation and recommendations on matters such as the development

of curriculum, standards for admission and graduation, and personnel actions such as hiring, promotion, dismissal and tenure of faculty;

➢ evidence that there is student representation appropriate to the governance structure selected by the institution for student participation;

➢ evidence that meetings of internal bodies, such as the faculty senate, are conducted to update them on mission, resources management, and academic issues; or

➢ if applicable, review of union contracts indicating negotiated role of faculty in curriculum, hiring of faculty, promotion, and tenure.

Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Context

An institution, regardless of its organization and the competence of its individual members, cannot function successfully unless it is properly administered and staffed. The administration should be organized with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and should have a thorough understanding of institutional mission, goals, and objectives.

The administrative structure typically includes a chief executive officer and other administrators such as a chief academic officer and a chief financial officer. As an administrative structure they collectively participate in guiding the institution to achieve its goals. As individuals, each provides oversight for the various administrative services of the institution, which may include academic programs, finance and operations, student services, research and planning, instructional technology, public relations and others. In some institutions, the chief executive officer and other members of the executive structure also may have responsibility for fundraising activities.

The chief executive officer reports to the governing body and is responsible for providing institutional vision and leadership. An educational institution's chief executive should have appropriate professional characteristics suitable to the mission of the organization. The CEO's leadership responsibilities include developing and implementing institutional plans, staffing the organization, locating and allocating resources and financial support, and directing the institution toward attaining its goals and objectives as set forth in its mission.

Administrators share responsibility for ensuring that institutional plans and activities are carried out and, therefore, should be qualified to provide effective leadership and efficient management consonant with the institution's goals, objectives, size, and complexity. Administrators should have the skills, time, assistance, technology, and information systems necessary to enable them to discharge their duties effectively. Consistent with the institution's mission, administration selection processes should give appropriate consideration to diversity in areas such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender. The administrative staff should work effectively as a team and work cooperatively with other constituencies of the institution.

Assignments of multiple functions to one individual or the assignment of administrative work (with or without compensation) to faculty members may be appropriate, but such practices should be reviewed periodically. Systematic procedures for evaluating administrative units and opportunities for the professional renewal of personnel should be established.

Administrators need close enough contact with current operations and faculty thinking to be effective in assisting the faculty and advancing the institution's goals and objectives. Administrators also need contact with students sufficient to understand their concerns and perspectives.

Fundamental Elements of Administration

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

> ➢ a chief executive whose primary responsibility is to lead the institution toward the achievement of its goals and with responsibility for administration of the institution;

> ➢ a chief executive with the combination of academic background, professional training, and/or other qualities appropriate to an institution of higher education and the institution's mission;

> ➢ administrative leaders with appropriate skills, degrees and training to carry out their responsibilities and functions;

> ➢ qualified staffing appropriate to the goals, type, size, and complexity of the institution;

> ➢ adequate information and decision-making systems to support the work of administrative leaders;

> ➢ clear documentation of the lines of organization and authority; and

> ➢ periodic assessment of the effectiveness of administrative structures and services.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➤ review of the sufficiency and effectiveness of directors, supervisors and administrators to carry out the functions of the institution;

➤ review of the adequacy of clerical, technological, and other support for administrative personnel;

➤ a review of the organizational structure and charts clearly indicating reporting/responsibility relationships to ensure that it is appropriately structured, and analysis of the structure's efficiency and effectiveness; or

➤ assessments of staff attitudes and satisfaction and staff development programs, with recommendations for improvement as appropriate.

Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

Context

Integrity is a central, indispensable and defining hallmark of effective higher education institutions, and it can manifest itself through the institution's conduct within each of the other standards. An institution may demonstrate integrity through the manner in which it specifies its goals, selects and retains its faculty, admits students, establishes curricula, determines programs of research, pursues its fields of service, demonstrates sensitivity to equity and diversity issues, allocates its resources, serves the public interest, and provides for the success of its students. Political interference in the affairs of an educational institution may threaten its freedom and effectiveness.

In all its activities, whether internal or external, an institution should keep its promises, honor its contracts and commitments, and represent itself truthfully. The same adherence to ethical standards and conduct should extend equally to all members of the institution, whether they are part of the institution through distance education programs, subsidiaries, or other arrangements. Institutions should adhere to such integrity in all institutional settings, venues, and activities.

Academic freedom, intellectual freedom and freedom of expression are central to the academic enterprise. These special privileges, characteristic of the academic environment, should be extended to all members of the institution's community (i.e. full-time faculty, adjunct, visiting or part time faculty, staff, students instructed on the campus, and those students associated with the institution via distance education programs).

Academic and intellectual freedom gives one the right and obligation as a scholar to examine data and to question assumptions. It also obliges instructors to present all information objectively because it asserts the student's right to know all pertinent facts and information. A particular point of view may be advanced, based upon complete access to the facts or opinions that underlie the argument, as long as the right to further inquiry and consideration remains unabridged.

To restrict the availability or to limit unreasonably the presentation of data or opinions is to deny academic freedom. The effective institution addresses diversity of opinion with openness and balance.

Intellectual freedom does not rule out commitment; rather it makes it possible. Freedom does not require neutrality on the part of individuals or educational institutions, or toward the value systems that may guide them. Institutions may hold particular political, social, or religious philosophies, as may individual faculty members or students; but both individuals and institutions should remain intellectually free and allow others the same freedom to pursue truth.

Educational institutions should exemplify within their own working environment those qualities that they endeavor to impart to their students. These include justice, equity, and respect for diversity and human dignity. Institutions whose charters and policies require adherence to specific beliefs or codes of conduct for faculty, staff, or students should provide prior notice of these requirements. The institution should state clearly the conditions of employment or study.

The basis of accreditation is self-reporting and peer-review. It is, therefore, essential that the relationship between the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and member institutions is one of trust and confidence. All changes and issues affecting institutional mission, goals, sites, programs, operations, and other material changes should be disclosed accurately and in a timely fashion to the accrediting association. Conversely, the accrediting association does not dictate the mission and goals of member institutions.

There will be times when issues of privacy require strict confidentiality. However, when possible and appropriate, the effective institution makes public factual information to those individuals and groups, including the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which would have a legitimate interest in the operations and achievements of the institution.

Fundamental Elements of Integrity

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

> ➤ fair and impartial processes, published and widely available, to address student grievances, such as alleged violations of institutional policies. The institution assures that student grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably;

> ➤ fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of employees;

> ➤ sound ethical practices and respect for individuals through its teaching, scholarship/research, service, and administrative practice, including the avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all its activities and among all its constituents;

> ➤ equitable and appropriately consistent treatment of constituencies, as evident in such areas as the application of academic requirements and policies, student discipline, student evaluation, grievance procedures,

faculty promotion, tenure, retention and compensation, administrative review, curricular improvement, and institutional governance and management;

➢ a climate of academic inquiry and engagement supported by widely disseminated policies regarding academic and intellectual freedom;

➢ an institutional commitment to principles of protecting intellectual property rights;

➢ a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for the range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives;

➢ honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, and recruiting and admissions materials and practices;

➢ required and elective courses that are sufficiently available to allow students to graduate within the published program length;

➢ reasonable, continuing student access to paper or electronic catalogs;

➢ when catalogs are available only electronically, the institution's web page provides a guide or index to catalog information for each catalog available electronically;

➢ when catalogs are available only electronically, the institution archives copies of the catalogs as sections or policies are updated;

➢ changes and issues affecting institutional mission, goals, sites, programs, operations, and other material changes are disclosed accurately and in a timely manner to the institution's community, to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and to any other appropriate regulatory bodies;

➢ availability of factual information about the institution, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education annual data reporting, the self-study or periodic review report, the team report, and the Commission's action, accurately reported and made publicly available to the institution's community;

➢ information on institution-wide assessments available to prospective students, including graduation, retention, certification and licensing pass rates, and other outcomes as appropriate to the programs offered;

➢ institutional information provided in a manner that ensures student and public access, such as print, electronic, or video presentation;

➢ fulfillment of all applicable standards and reporting and other requirements of the Commission; and

➢ periodic assessment of the integrity evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the manner in which these are implemented.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate

evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

> ➢ review of policies governing news releases and public announcements describing the institution or explaining its position on various issues;

> ➢ review and analysis of policies and their consistent application regarding the recording of grades on transcripts and regarding re-take exams;

> ➢ review and analysis of policies and their consistent application regarding deadlines for add, drop, and withdrawal from courses or programs;

> ➢ analysis of the rigor of academic programs including the use of take-home and open book exams or the use of exams that do not require application of skills, knowledge, or competencies gained through participation in the course or program;

> ➢ analysis of the application of institutional policies governing conflict of interest;

> ➢ review of promotion and tenure statistics;

> ➢ review of student grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures, as well as resulting actions or outcomes; or

> ➢ evidence that faculty and staff handbooks describe promotion, compensation, tenure, and grievance procedures, and an analysis of outcomes of these activities.

Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Context

Assessment may be characterized as the third element of a four-step planning-assessment cycle:

1. Developing clearly articulated written statements, expressed in observable terms, of key institutional and unit-level goals that are based on the involvement of the institutional community, as discussed under Standard 1 (Mission and Goals);

2. Designing intentional objectives or strategies to achieve those goals, as discussed under Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal);

3. Assessing achievement of those key goals; and

4. Using the results of those assessments to improve programs and services, as discussed under Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal), with appropriate links to the institution's ongoing planning and resource allocation processes.

The effectiveness of an institution rests upon the contribution that each of the institution's programs and services makes toward achieving the goals of the institution as a whole. This standard on institutional assessment thus builds upon all other accreditation standards, each of which includes periodic assessment of effectiveness as one of its fundamental elements. This standard ties together those assessments into an integrated whole to answer the question, "As an institutional community, how well are we collectively doing what we say we are doing?" and, in particular, "How do we support student learning, a fundamental aspect of institutional effectiveness?" Because student learning is a fundamental component of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness and is the focus of Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). Self-studies can thus document compliance with Standard 7 by summarizing the assessments of each accreditation standard into conclusions about the institution's overall achievement of its key goals.

The fundamental question asked in the accreditation process is, "Is the institution fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals?" This is precisely the question that assessment is designed to answer, making assessment essential to the accreditation process. Assessment processes help to ensure the following:

- Institutional and program-level goals are clear to the public, students, faculty, and staff;
- Institutional programs and resources are organized and coordinated to achieve institutional and program-level goals;
- The institution is indeed achieving its mission and goals; and
- The institution is using assessment results to improve student learning and otherwise advance the institution.

While the Commission expects institutions to assess institutional effectiveness, it does not prescribe a specific approach or methodology. The institution is responsible for determining its expected goals and the objectives or strategies for achieving them at each level (institutional and unit), assessment approaches and methodologies, sequence, and time frame. These may vary, based on the mission, goals, organization, and resources of the institution. Whatever the approach, effective assessment processes are useful, cost-effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained.

Useful assessment processes help faculty and staff make appropriate decisions about improving programs and services, developing goals and plans, and making resource allocations. To assist with interpretation and use of assessment results, assessment measures and indicators have defined minimally acceptable performance targets. Because institutions, their students, and their environments are continually evolving, effective assessments cannot be static; they must be reviewed periodically and adapted in order to remain useful.

Cost-effective assessment processes yield dividends that justify the institution's investment in them, particularly in terms of faculty and staff time. To this end, institutions may begin by considering assessment measures, indicators, "flags," and "scorecards" already in place, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates, financial ratios, and surveys. New or refined measures may then be added for those goals and objectives for which evidence of achievement is not already available, concentrating on the institution's most important goals. Effective assessments are simple rather than elaborate and may focus on just a few key goals in each program, unit, and curriculum.

Reasonably-accurate and truthful assessment processes yield results that can be used with confidence to make appropriate decisions. Because there is no one perfectly accurate assessment tool or strategy, institutions should use multiple kinds of measures to assess goal achievement. Assessments may be quantitative and/or qualitative and developed locally or by an external organization. All assessment tools and strategies should clearly relate to the goals they are assessing and should be developed with care; they should not be merely anecdotal information nor collections of information that happen to be on hand. Strategies to assess student learning should include direct—clear,

visible, and convincing—evidence, rather than solely indirect evidence of student learning such as surveys and focus groups.

Planned assessment processes that purposefully correspond to institutional goals that they are intended to assess promote attention to those goals and ensure that disappointing outcomes are appropriately addressed. Institutions often have a variety of plans, such as a strategic plan, academic plan, financial plan, enrollment plan, capital facilities master plan, and technology plan. Just as such plans should be interrelated to ensure that they work synergistically to advance the institution, assessments should also be interrelated. At many institutions, effective institutional planning begins with academic planning, which in turn drives the other plans. If the academic plan calls for a new academic program, for example, the technology plan should ensure faculty and students in the new program will be able to use appropriate instructional technologies. Assessments of the technology plan should evaluate not just whether instructional technologies have been put in place but also how effectively those technologies have helped students to achieve the program's key learning outcomes.

Organized, systematized, and sustained assessment processes are ongoing, not once-and-done. There should be clear interrelationships among institutional goals, program- and unit-level goals, and course-level goals. Assessments should relate clearly to important goals, and improvements should clearly stem from assessment results.

As noted earlier, because student learning is a fundamental component of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness. An institution may therefore create institutional effectiveness documentation that includes a component on assessing student learning (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning), or it may create a bridge between two separate sets of documentation, one for the assessment of student learning and one for other aspects of institutional effectiveness.

A commitment to the assessment of institutional effectiveness requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use. Assessment information, derived in a manner appropriate to the institution and to its desired outcomes, should be available to and used by those who develop institutional goals and carry out strategies to achieve them. As discussed under Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal), an accredited institution uses the results of assessment for institutional renewal: to maintain, support, and improve its programs and services. Assessment information should be used as a basis for assessing the institution's effectiveness in achieving its stated goals, for monitoring and improving the environment for student learning, and for enhancing overall student success; to these ends, it should be linked to the institution's ongoing planning and resource allocation processes.

Assessment results also should be used to evaluate the assessment process itself, leading to modifications that improve its relevance and effectiveness.

Fundamental Elements of Institutional Assessment

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ documented, organized, and sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve the total range of programs and services; achievement of institutional mission, goals, and plans; and compliance with accreditation standards that meets the following criteria:

  ○ a foundation in the institution's mission and clearly articulated institutional, unit-level, and program-level goals that encompass all programs, services, and initiatives and are appropriately integrated with one another (see Standards 1: Mission and Goals and 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal);

  ○ systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures that:

    • maximize the use of existing data and information;

    • clearly and purposefully relate to the goals they are assessing;

    • are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions;

  ○ support and collaboration of faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results;

  ○ clear realistic guidelines and a timetable, supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources;

  ○ sufficient simplicity, practicality, detail, and ownership to be sustainable;

  ○ periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution's assessment process;

➢ evidence that assessment results are shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and used in institutional planning, resource allocation, and renewal (see Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal) to improve and gain efficiencies in programs, services and processes, including activities specific to the institution's mission (e.g., service, outreach, research); and

➢ written institutional (strategic) plan(s) that reflect(s) consideration of assessment results.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ analysis of the institutional culture for assessing institutional effectiveness, including:

    ○ the views of faculty and administrators on assessment;

    ○ faculty and administrators' understanding of their roles in assessing institutional effectiveness;

    ○ campus-wide efforts to encourage, recognize, and value efforts to assess institutional effectiveness and to improve programs and services;

➢ analysis of the quality and usefulness of institutional support for assessment efforts, including the quality and usefulness of:

    ○ written statements of expectations for assessment work;

    ○ policies and governance structures to support institutional assessment;

    ○ administrative, technical, and financial support for institutional assessment activities;

    ○ professional development opportunities and resources for faculty and staff to learn how to assess institutional effectiveness and how to use the results;

➢ clear, appropriate criteria for determining whether key institutional goals and objectives have been achieved;

➢ analysis of whether the institution has sufficient, convincing, written evidence that it is achieving its mission and its key institutional goals;

➢ analysis of results of surveys of students and other relevant groups;

➢ review of evaluations of special, mission driven programs or projects, with recommendations for improvement, and evidence of action based on recommendations;

➢ evidence that institutional assessment findings are used to:

    ○ improve student success;

    ○ review and improve programs and services;

    ○ plan, conduct, and support professional development activities;

    ○ assist in planning and budgeting for the provision of programs and services;

    ○ support decisions about strategic goals, plans, and resource allocation;

- inform appropriate constituents about the institution and its programs;

➢ evidence of renewal strategies, made in response to assessment results [included also under Standard 2 Optional Analyses]; or

➢ analysis of evidence that renewal strategies made in response to assessment results have had the desired effect in improving programs, services, and initiatives.

Educational Effectiveness

Student Admissions and Retention

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

Context

The student is the primary beneficiary of an institution's educational mission, and the success of an institution or program is best measured by the success of its students during and after their enrollment in an institution's programs. Every institution's admission practices should ensure that students have a reasonable opportunity for success in meeting their educational goals, including transfer, graduate, part-time, adult, and non-degree students, and all others matriculating at the institution. In some institutions, additional support services may be required in order to ensure the retention and success of its students.

The criteria used to assess the congruence among recruitment, admission, retention and academic success may vary depending on institutional goals and structure and on student needs and educational objectives. Therefore an enrollment management plan for recruitment, retention, marketing, and advertising may assist institutions in ensuring congruence among its efforts. For all institutions, however, admissions criteria and practices are important elements in promoting student retention and success. Analysis of student persistence and attrition data should inform the periodic review of admissions criteria and policies.

Fundamental Elements of Student Admissions

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

> ➢ admissions policies, developed and implemented, that support and reflect the mission of the institution;

> ➢ admissions policies and criteria available to assist the prospective student in making informed decisions;

- programs and services to ensure that admitted students who marginally meet or do not meet the institution's qualifications achieve expected learning goals and higher education outcomes at appropriate points;

- accurate and comprehensive information regarding academic programs, including any required placement or diagnostic testing;

- statements of expected student learning outcomes and information on institution-wide assessment results, as appropriate to the program offered, available to prospective students;

- accurate and comprehensive information, and advice where appropriate, regarding financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, and refunds;

- published and implemented policies and procedures regarding transfer credit and credit for extra-institutional college level learning that state the criteria established by the institution regarding transfer of credit; and

- ongoing assessment of student success, including but not necessarily limited to retention, that evaluates the match between the attributes of admitted students and the institution's mission and programs, and reflects its findings in its admissions, remediation, and other related policies.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- review of the enrollment management plan for recruitment, retention, marketing, and advertising;

- evidence of the periodic review of admissions catalogs, viewbooks, web sites, recruiting and other relevant materials for accuracy and effectiveness;

- evidence that support programs and services for low-achieving students are effective in helping students to persist and to achieve learning goals and higher education outcomes;

- review of procedures that guide the admissions program and policies or guidelines regarding the type of information the institution makes known to potential students and the general public;

- evidence of periodic review of the accuracy and effectiveness of financial aid information, scholarship material, and academic advising materials;

➢ evidence of the utilization of information appropriate to the review of financial aid practices, to reflect whether practices adequately support admission and retention efforts;

➢ evidence of the utilization of information appropriate to the review of student retention, persistence, and attrition, to reflect whether these are consistent with student and institutional expectations (also under Optional Analysis in Standard 14); or

➢ evidence of the utilization of attrition information to ascertain characteristics of students who withdraw prior to attaining their educational objectives and, as appropriate, implementation of strategies to improve retention (also under Optional Analysis in Standard 14).

Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Context

The support of students toward their educational goals usually requires a well-organized and appropriate program of student services, complemented by good staff leadership and broad-based institutional commitment. Within the scope of the institutional mission, student services can reinforce and extend the college's influence beyond the classroom. These services promote the comprehensive development of the student, and they become an integral part of the educational process, helping to strengthen learning outcomes. Appropriate and comparable student services should support the learning of all students in the context of the institution's mission and chosen educational delivery system. Similarly, the institution should clearly convey to students their roles and responsibilities as partners in the educational process. The quality of campus life often contributes significantly to student learning; therefore, institutions, and particularly those with residential populations, should be attentive to a wide range of student life issues, including mental health and safety.

Framed by the institution's mission, services should be responsive to the full spectrum of diverse student needs, abilities, and cultures. Dependent upon institutional mission, support services may include but are not limited to admissions, financial aid, registration, orientation, advising, counseling, tutoring, discipline, health, housing, placement, student organizations and activities, cultural programming, child care, security, and athletic activities.

Delivery of student support services should be flexible in nature and should vary depending on the modes and levels of educational delivery. Consistent with institutional mission, programs should be available to provide support to diverse student populations such as older students, students with disabilities, international students, distance education students, distributed learning students, correspondence education students, and students at sites other than a main campus.

Recreational, intercollegiate, and intramural athletic programs should be consistent with, and actively supportive of, the institution's mission and goals and consistent with the academic success, physical and emotional well-being, and social development of those who participate.

Fundamental Elements of Student Support Services

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ a program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission, consistent with student learning expectations, and available regardless of place or method of delivery;

- ➢ qualified professionals to supervise and provide the student support services and programs;

- ➢ procedures to address the varied spectrum of student academic and other needs, in a manner that is equitable, supportive, and sensitive, through direct service or referral;

- ➢ appropriate student advisement procedures and processes;

- ➢ if offered, athletic programs that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles, norms, and procedures that govern other institutional programs;

- ➢ reasonable procedures, widely disseminated, for equitably addressing student complaints or grievances;

- ➢ records of student complaints or grievances;

- ➢ policies and procedures, developed and implemented, for safe and secure maintenance of student records ;

- ➢ published and implemented policies for the release of student information; and

- ➢ ongoing assessment of student support services and the utilization of assessment results for improvement.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ➢ analysis of support services available to students, including any distinctions among physical sites or modes of delivery and the particular support services those sites/modes require (instructional technology support, library/learning resources support, etc.);

- ➢ evidence of a structure appropriate to the delivery of student support services (organizational chart);

- ➢ review of student handbooks, catalogs, newspapers, and schedules, including materials showing availability and explaining the nature of services (published in print and/or available electronically);

- ➢ evidence of student grievances and resolutions, and review of such records to determine whether there are noteworthy patterns;

- ➢ review of reports or other evidence of student involvement in and satisfaction with academic support services and co-curricular activities; or

- ➢ assessments of student advising and service programs, with recommendations for improvements and evidence of action based on recommendations.

Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Context

Teaching and learning are central to the activities of faculty members at each institution, and faculty bear primary responsibility for promoting, facilitating, assuring, and evaluating student learning. The faculty and other qualified professionals are responsible for devising and developing an institution's academic, professional, research, and service programs within the framework of its educational mission and goals. They are committed to all aspects of students' success.

Within some institutions, functions previously assumed to be a part of traditional faculty roles are now the responsibility of other qualified professionals. A professional is qualified by virtue of education, training, experience or appropriate skills. Designated professional qualifications should be consistent with the expected academic outcome, reflecting both appropriate standards of quality and the institutional mission. Whenever used in these standards, the term "faculty" shall be broadly construed to encompass qualified professionals such as third parties contracted by the institution, part-time or adjunct faculty, and those assigned responsibilities in academic development and delivery. Such professionals may include, as well, those responsible for the institution's academic information resources.

There should be an adequate core of faculty and other qualified professionals that is responsible to the institution, supports the programs offered, and assures the continuity and coherence of the institution's programs. Faculty selection processes should give appropriate consideration to the value of faculty diversity, consistent with institutional mission. Faculty participation in institutional planning, curriculum review, and other governance roles can be an appropriate recognition of their professional competence and commitment, where consistent with institutional governance structures. Such participation should complement the faculty's primary responsibilities for teaching, research, and scholarship.

Articulated and equitable procedures and criteria for periodic evaluation of all faculty contribute significantly to sustaining an appropriate level of growth and excellence. Such procedures and criteria for periodic evaluation support those who, regardless of their professional titles, are responsible for the development

and delivery of programs and services. Encouragement for faculty research, as well as for professional advancement and development, are characteristics of enlightened institutional policies.

For institutions relying on part-time, adjunct, temporary, or other faculty on time-limited contracts, employment policies and practices should be as carefully developed and communicated as those for full-time faculty. The greater the dependence on such employees, the greater is the institutional responsibility to provide orientation, oversight, evaluation, professional development, and opportunities for integration into the life of the institution.

The existence of collective bargaining agreements is an institutional matter or, as in the case of some public institutions, a matter of public policy. Although the Middle States Commission on Higher Education takes no position with respect to a decision to bargain collectively, all affected constituents should be attentive to the impact of bargaining on students and their needs, on professional relationships and responsibilities, and on educational effectiveness.

Fundamental Elements of Faculty

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

> ➢ faculty and other professionals appropriately prepared and qualified for the positions they hold, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and sufficiently numerous to fulfill those roles appropriately;

> ➢ educational curricula designed, maintained, and updated by faculty and other professionals who are academically prepared and qualified;

> ➢ faculty and other professionals, including teaching assistants, who demonstrate excellence in teaching and other activities, and who demonstrate continued professional growth;

> ➢ appropriate institutional support for the advancement and development of faculty, including teaching, research, scholarship, and service;

> ➢ recognition of appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning, research, and service;

> ➢ published and implemented standards and procedures for all faculty and other professionals, for actions such as appointment, promotion, tenure, grievance, discipline and dismissal, based on principles of fairness with due regard for the rights of all persons;

> ➢ carefully articulated, equitable, and implemented procedures and criteria for reviewing all individuals who have responsibility for the educational program of the institution;

> ➢ criteria for the appointment, supervision, and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct, and other faculty consistent with those for full-time faculty;

> ➢ adherence to principles of academic freedom, within the context of institutional mission; and

➢ assessment of policies and procedures to ensure the use of qualified professionals to support the institution's programs.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence of faculty productivity in the scholarship of teaching as well as in discipline-specific research and scholarship and in the creation of knowledge, consistent with the institution's mission;

➢ analysis of the relationship between faculty characteristics and performance and student learning outcomes;

➢ review of results of implemented appointment, promotion, and tenure standards and procedures;

➢ evidence of dissemination of evaluation procedures and criteria;

➢ analysis of reports from faculty peer evaluations of teaching, scholarship and service;

➢ analysis of institutional practices for the appointment, supervision, and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct, and other faculty on time-limited contracts;

➢ analysis of the training, role, and effectiveness of graduate students who provide undergraduate instruction;

➢ analysis of teaching effectiveness evaluations, including identification of good practices; or

➢ assessments of faculty attitudes and satisfaction, faculty development programs and of policies and procedures that ensure that qualified professionals advance the institution's instructional, research, and service program goals, with recommendations for improvement, as appropriate.

Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Context

Teaching and learning are the primary purposes of any institution of higher education, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. The breadth and depth of student learning appropriate to the programs and levels of study and the demonstrable ability of students to integrate knowledge are key elements in judging the success of an institution's educational programs.

While individual goals of undergraduate study may vary, most graduate study has as its immediate goal the achievement of an advanced degree—that of master or doctor—or a diploma, certificate, or recognized statement of earned credit through the formal, structured pursuit of learning beyond the level of the baccalaureate degree. Graduate studies should offer focused study and relevant independent research of a specialized nature, within the context of comprehensive institutional aims and with principled attention to related demands on institutional resources and implications for the institution's teaching climate. While the focus and intensity of an undergraduate versus graduate program may be different, this section of *Characteristics* applies equally to both undergraduate and graduate education.

Educational courses, programs, and experiences are not static constructs. Their creation and lifespan may be characterized as part of a dynamic four-step cycle:

1. Developing clearly articulated written statements of expected learning outcomes;

2. Designing learning experiences that provide explicit opportunities for students to achieve those learning outcomes;

3. Implementing appropriate measures of student achievement of key learning outcomes, as discussed under Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning); and

4. Using the results of those assessments to improve teaching and learning, again as discussed under Standard 14.

Effective educational offerings thus begin with expected learning outcomes: statements, expressed in observable terms, of the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students are expected to exhibit upon successful completion of a course, academic program, co-curricular program, general education requirement, or other specific set of experiences. Effective statements of student learning outcomes are developed with the involvement of the institution's community and their review of existing learning goals. Just as educational curricula are designed, maintained, and updated by faculty and other professionals who are academically prepared and qualified, as discussed under Standard 10 (Faculty), faculty should be influential in the substantive determination of key learning outcomes at all levels: institutional, program, and course.

Institutional-level learning outcomes stem from the institution's mission and are often embodied in the learning outcomes of the general education curriculum, although an institution may have institutional learning outcomes that students achieve in other ways. A college may, for example, have learning goals that are achieved through a community service requirement for all students, a religious institution may require participation in religious activities, or an art school may have institutional learning goals common to all its academic programs. It is essential, however, to ensure that all students, regardless of their particular course of study, have adequate, progressive opportunities to achieve institutional-level learning outcomes.

Appropriate interrelationships among institutional, program-level, and course-level learning outcomes should be evident. For example, a course required within a program should help students achieve at least one of the program's key learning outcomes and should have stated course-level learning outcomes to this effect. Some learning outcomes may be repeated across courses or programs, and some institutional or program level learning outcomes may be syntheses of multiple course level learning outcomes.

Students learn more effectively when they understand the key learning outcomes of their program, course, and institution, how they are expected to achieve those learning goals (i.e., through what assignments and learning experiences), and how they are expected to demonstrate their learning. Statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and course levels should be available to current and prospective students (see Standard 8: Student Admissions). Course-level expected student learning outcomes should be included in course syllabi. Statements of expected student learning also should be available to those planning and implementing assessment activities and to those evaluating programs and the institution (see Standards 7: Institutional Assessment and 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

The second step in the process of developing educational offerings is using statements of expected student learning to create a coherent, purposeful program of study, not simply a collection of courses, that leads to those desired outcomes. As noted under Standard 10 (Faculty), educational curricula are normally designed, maintained, and updated by faculty and other professionals who are academically prepared and qualified. Educational programs and curricula at institutions of higher education should exhibit the following:

sufficient content, rigor and depth to be characterized as collegiate or graduate level learning, as appropriate, with a clear distinction between pre-college and college level study, and between undergraduate and graduate study;

clear linkages between the design of specific courses, programs, and learning activities and the articulated goals of the specific programs of which they are part and to the overarching mission of the institution; and

responsiveness to new research findings and modes of inquiry.

Several skills, collectively referred to as "information literacy," apply to all disciplines in an institution's curricula. These skills relate to a student's competency in acquiring and processing information in the search for understanding, whether that information is sought in or through the facilities of a library, through practica, as a result of field experiments, by communications with experts in professional communities, or by other means. Therefore, information literacy is an essential component of any educational program at the graduate or undergraduate levels.

These skills include the ability to:
- determine the nature and extent of needed information;
- access information effectively and efficiently;
- evaluate critically the sources and content of information;
- incorporate selected information in the learner's knowledge base and value system;
- use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose;
- understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and information technology; and
- observe laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the access and use of information.

Closely tied to information literacy is the need for technological competency at all levels within an institution and its curricula. Higher education has new information sources and technologies that supplement its print-based knowledge resources and present new challenges for teachers and learners who must learn how to develop and use general or discipline-specific technologies to identify, retrieve, and apply relevant information. Therefore, institutions should provide both students and instructors with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to use the information, new technology, and media for their studies, teaching, or research. As information technologies emerge, institutions may offer periodic updating or retraining.

In addition to information literacy and technological competency, the institution's curricula should be designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency (see Standard 12: General Education). While these skills are often addressed within a general education curriculum, they must often be further addressed within degree or certificate programs so that students may become proficient in these skills as they are applied within a particular field of study.

Effective educational offerings are predicated upon the availability and accessibility of adequate learning resources, such as library and information technology support services, staffed by professionals who are qualified by education, training, and experience to support relevant academic activities.

While there should be coherence within any program of study, there also should be coherence between an institution's curricular offerings and the other experiences that contribute to the total educational environment and promote the development of life skills. The mission of the institution and the characteristics of its students determine the appropriateness of co-curricular activities, which may include out-of-class lectures and exhibitions, study abroad, civic involvement, independent learning and research, opportunities for informal student-faculty contact and other student activities (see Standard 9: Student Support Services). These experiences foster the personal and social development of students in areas such as personal aspirations, integrity and responsibility, self-awareness and self-reliance, awareness of values, interpersonal relationships, and leadership. An institution may integrate community services with educational programs, enhancing the effectiveness with which it fulfills both its educational mission and its responsibility to society.

Recognition of college-level learning from other institutions may facilitate a student's progress without compromising an institution's integrity or the quality of its degrees. An institution's articulation and transfer policies and procedures should provide appropriate consideration, consistent with good educational practice, for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. In such policies, the institution should judge courses, programs, degrees and other learning experiences, not on their modes of delivery, but on their learning outcomes and the existence of valid evaluation measures, including third-party expert review.

Increasingly, higher education institutions are serving adult learners, a population whose learning needs are different from those of traditional full-time or residential students. As noted under Standard 9 (Student Support Services), institutions with a focus on adult learning need to demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity by developing institutional policies and practices that are appropriate to and supportive of adult learners.

Fundamental Elements of Educational Offerings

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities. These elements also apply to all other educational activities addressed within Standard 13.

> ➤ educational offerings congruent with its mission, which include appropriate areas of academic study of sufficient content, breadth and length, and conducted at levels of rigor appropriate to the programs or degrees offered;

> ➤ formal undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs—leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential—designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning;

- program goals that are stated in terms of student learning outcomes;

- periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of any curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular experiences that the institution provides its students and utilization of evaluation results as a basis for improving its student development program and for enabling students to understand their own educational progress (see Standards 9: Student Support Services and 14: Assessment of Student Learning);

- learning resources, facilities, instructional equipment, library services, and professional library staff adequate to support the institution's educational programs;

- collaboration among professional library staff, faculty, and administrators in fostering information literacy and technological competency skills across the curriculum;

- programs that promote student use of a variety of information and learning resources;

- provision of comparable quality of teaching/instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness of the institution's courses and programs regardless of the location or delivery mode;

- published and implemented policies and procedures regarding transfer credit that describe the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credits earned at another institution. The consideration of transfer credit or recognition of degrees will not be determined exclusively on the basis of the accreditation of the sending institution or the mode of delivery but, rather, will consider course equivalencies, including expected learning outcomes, with those of the receiving institution's curricula and standards. Such criteria will be fair, consistently applied, and publicly communicated;

- policies and procedures to assure that the educational expectations, rigor, and student learning within any accelerated degree program are comparable to those that characterize more traditional program formats;

- consistent with the institution's educational programs and student cohorts, practices and policies that reflect the needs of adult learners;

- course syllabi that incorporate expected learning outcomes; and

- assessment of student learning and program outcomes relative to the goals and objectives of the undergraduate programs and the use of the results to improve student learning and program effectiveness (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Additional Elements for Graduate and Professional Education

➢ graduate curricula providing for the development of research and independent thinking that studies at the advanced level presuppose;

➢ faculty with credentials appropriate to the graduate curricula; and

➢ assessment of student learning and program outcomes relative to the goals and objectives of the graduate programs (including professional and clinical skills, professional examinations and professional placement where applicable) and the use of the results to improve student learning and program effectiveness (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning).

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence of completed analytical program reviews (of educational offerings) that address topics such as the following:

  ○ appropriateness to institutional mission;
  ○ relevance to student goals, interests and aspirations;
  ○ clarity of educational goals and related strategies for assessing student achievement of those goals;
  ○ provision of adequate time on task and information to learn and to practice the knowledge, skills and abilities imparted by each program;
  ○ provision of adequate balance between theory and practice, given programmatic and institutional goals;
  ○ opportunity to integrate instructional and non-instructional experiences;
  ○ opportunity for active student engagement in the learning undertaken;
  ○ opportunity to practice and improve upon skills associated with the field or area studied;
  ○ opportunity for collaborative learning and to work with others in the completion of learning tasks;
  ○ provision of an atmosphere of inquiry where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued

- ➢ evidence of student understanding of the key learning goals of their program, courses, and institution, how they are expected to achieve those learning goals (i.e., through what assignments and learning experiences), and how they are expected to demonstrate their learning;

- ➢ review of results from the institution's implemented outcomes assessment plan (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning);

- ➢ evidence of local and remote information resources, access structures, and technologies adequate to support the curriculum;

- ➢ evidence of information literacy incorporated into the curriculum with syllabi, or other material appropriate to the mode of teaching and learning, describing expectations for students' demonstration of information literacy skills;

- ➢ evidence of accessible reference tools to ascertain where relevant materials exist and are located;

- ➢ assessment of information literacy outcomes, including assessment of related learner abilities;

- ➢ evidence of trained instructional and reference staff, or other support services, available on-site or via remote access, to help students and teaching staff locate and evaluate information tools and resources;

- ➢ evidence of an adequate policy and process, tailored to the mission and goals of the institution, for the development and management of information resources;

- ➢ analysis of transfer trends and patterns, both to and from the institution;

- ➢ review of articulation agreements and analysis of their impact and effectiveness; or

- ➢ review of the impact of transfer agreements or transfer acceptance mandates on the coherence and integrity of the institution's degree programs

Additional Optional Analysis and Evidence for Graduate and Professional Education

Similarly for graduate and professional education:

- ➢ evidence of graduate and professional program goals and objectives that are well-defined, coherent, reflective of institutional mission, and consistent with the profession for which the program prepares students;

- ➢ review of the impact of graduate and professional programs on the overall resources of the institution;

- ➢ evidence of defined roles and responsibilities for graduate students, especially those who serve as undergraduate instructors and laboratory assistants; or

- ➢ assessment of the training, role, and effectiveness of graduate students who provide undergraduate instruction.

General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

Context

General education is an important component of all undergraduate and some graduate higher education degree programs. All undergraduate and those graduate programs that include a general education component are expected to meet this standard and the related Fundamental Elements. Graduate programs that do not include general education components should ensure that students at admission have appropriate general education skills.

Institutions should identify and provide a recognizable core of general education that:
- expresses the educational philosophy of the institution for each undergraduate degree program or cluster of degree programs;
- incorporates essential knowledge, cognitive abilities, and an understanding of values and ethics;
- enhances students' intellectual growth; and
- draws students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and sensitivity, and preparing them to make enlightened judgments outside as well as within their academic specialty.

What are presented here as general education skills are not necessarily distinct and apart from each other. There is an inherent relationship among these skills. This interrelatedness is evident in the concept of "information literacy," which embraces all of the specific general education skills (see Context, Standard 11).

Consistent with institutional practices, general education degree requirements may be fulfilled through courses completed at the institution, transfer credits, competencies demonstrated in ways determined by the institution, or admission prerequisites.

A general education program—developed, owned, and reviewed by the institution's faculty—should be purposeful, coherent, engaging, and rigorous. General education skills may be taught or developed as part of courses in the major, in separate courses, or through a decentralized distribution. However, the

skills and knowledge derived from general education and the major should be integrated because general education and study in depth, together, comprise a quality undergraduate education.

Institutions offering the associate and baccalaureate degrees will strike an appropriate balance between specialized and more general knowledge. The institution's ability to demonstrate that its students are able to integrate and apply in different contexts the core knowledge and skills learned in their course work is a critical component of successful undergraduate educational programs.

General education offerings should reflect the particular programs and mission of the institution. However, general education courses should not focus narrowly on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The content of general education within specialized degree programs should be comparable, though not necessarily identical, to traditional academic offerings at the collegiate level or above. Programs in postsecondary vocational technical institutions should evidence recognition of the relationship between broad education and the acquisition of techniques and skills. In professional degree programs beyond the baccalaureate, courses in ethics, humanities, and public policy may be particularly relevant.

Fundamental Elements of General Education

An accredited institution offering undergraduate degrees and some graduate institutions are expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ a program of general education of sufficient scope to enhance students' intellectual growth, and equivalent to at least 15 semester hours for associate degree programs and 30 semester hours for baccalaureate programs; (An institution also may demonstrate how an alternative approach fulfills the intent of this fundamental element.)

- ➢ a program of general education where the skills and abilities developed in general education are applied in the major or concentration;

- ➢ consistent with institutional mission, a program of general education that incorporates study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives;

- ➢ institutional requirements assuring that, upon degree completion, students are proficient in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and technological competency appropriate to the discipline;

- ➢ general education requirements clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution; and

- ➢ assessment of general education outcomes within the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and evidence that such assessment results are utilized for curricular improvement.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence of institutional statements of the rationale supporting the curriculum and the benefits of a quality general education program; and evidence that this rationale has been communicated to students, parents, advisors, employers, and other constituencies;

➢ analysis of statements of institutional mission, goals, or objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education);

➢ analysis of statements of individual curricular or degree program goals/objectives relative to core knowledge and skills (general education);

➢ evidence of articulated expectations of student learning outcomes for written communication, speech communication, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning, information literacy, technological competence, and critical analysis and reasoning for all undergraduate degree students;

➢ evidence of student understanding of the key learning outcomes of each general education requirement;

➢ evidence of institutional support for the general education program (administrative structure, budget, faculty incentives); or

➢ evidence of completed analytical review of the general education curriculum that addresses topics such as:

○ appropriateness to institutional mission;

○ relevance to student goals, interests and aspirations;

○ provision of adequate time on task and information to learn and to practice the knowledge, skills and abilities imparted by each requirement within the program;

○ provision of adequate balance between theory and practice, given curricular and institutional goals;

○ opportunity for active student engagement in the learning undertaken;

- opportunity for collaborative learning and to work with others in the completion of learning tasks; or

- provision of an atmosphere of inquiry where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are valued.

Related Educational Activities

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Context

The integrity and credibility of an educational program rest directly on the institution's acceptance of responsibility for all activities conducted in its name or under its sponsorship. Consistent with their missions, many institutions offer programs and activities that are defined by their particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship. These offerings could include basic skills, certificate programs, evaluated experiential learning, non-credit offerings, branch campuses/additional locations/other instructional sites, distance education, distributed learning, correspondence education, and contractual relationships/affiliated providers, among others. Such programs or activities must adhere to the standards for accreditation.

Some of these programs/activities are described below with brief narrative statements, followed by the identification of one or more Fundamental Elements and optional analysis and evidence. If an institution offers any of these educational activities, the institution is expected to meet this standard (13) and the related Fundamental Elements, as well as the relevant Fundamental Elements for Standard 11.

Basic Skills

Under prepared students may benefit from basic skills or developmental courses provided by an institution as part of its educational offerings. When offered, such pre-college level courses, taken prior to or concurrent with enrollment in degree credit courses, can prepare the student for success in achieving his or her educational goals.

Fundamental Elements of Basic Skills

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ systematic procedures for identifying students who are not fully prepared for college level study;

- ➢ provision of or referral to relevant courses and support services for admitted under-prepared students; and

- ➢ remedial or pre-collegiate level courses that do not carry academic degree credit.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ➢ review of the effectiveness of tests or measures used to place students in developmental courses;

- ➢ analysis of the impact of developmental program completion on student persistence and academic achievement in degree programs and courses; or

- ➢ assessment of the effectiveness of support services for under-prepared students.

Certificate Programs

Certificate programs are postsecondary non-degree credentials including pre-baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, post-masters, or post-doctoral level, granted upon completion of a coherent, sequential program of study, usually for credit. Such certificate programs and the courses included within them should follow the institution's usual development, approval, review, and assessment processes; should include articulated expected student knowledge, skills, and competency levels; and should comply with industry, national, or other definitions of such credentials, where appropriate.

Fundamental Elements of Certificate Programs

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ certificate programs, consistent with institutional mission, that have clearly articulated program goals, objectives and expectations of student

learning and that are designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures;

➢ published program objectives, requirements, and curricular sequence;

➢ program learning goals consistent with national criteria, as appropriate;

➢ available and effective student support services; and

➢ if courses completed within a certificate program are applicable to a degree program offered by the institution, academic oversight assures the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence of articulated student knowledge, skills, and competency levels;

➢ evidence of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the design, delivery, and ongoing evaluation of certificate programs;

➢ review of stated rationale, where processes for program oversight and quality assurance are different or separate from the institution's regular processes;

➢ analysis of availability and effectiveness of appropriate student support services; or

➢ analysis of the impact of certificate programs on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning generally refers to knowledge or skills obtained outside of a higher education institution. Recognition of college-level experiential learning, which is derived from work, structured internships, or other life experience, may facilitate a student's progress without compromising an institution's integrity or the quality of its degrees. An institution's policies and procedures should provide appropriate consideration, consistent with good educational practice, for the individual student who has gained college level learning from other sources. However, procedures to assess learning for the award of academic credit (especially where such credit is part of an accelerated degree program) should

define college-level learning and state clearly that credit is awarded for demonstrated learning, and not merely for experience.

Fundamental Elements of Experiential Learning

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ credit awarded for experiential learning that is supported by evidence in the form of an evaluation of the level, quality and quantity of that learning;

➢ published and implemented policies and procedures defining the methods by which prior learning can be evaluated and the level and amount of credit available by evaluation;

➢ published and implemented policies and procedures regarding the award of credit for prior learning that define the acceptance of such credit based on the institution's curricula and standards;

➢ published and implemented procedures regarding the recording of evaluated prior learning by the awarding institution;

➢ credit awarded appropriate to the subject and the degree context into which it is accepted; and

➢ evaluators of experiential learning who are knowledgeable about the subject matter and about the institution's criteria for the granting of college credit.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ analysis of the amount and type of evaluated learning credit awarded by discipline;

➢ analysis of the reports prepared by evaluators including the methods of assessing the learning and the information or competencies considered;

➢ review of standards utilized by evaluators in assessing college level learning;

➢ analysis of student portfolios or other means used to demonstrate college level learning;

- analysis of consistency in the award of college credit for experiential learning across the institution;

- analysis of consistency in the award of college credit for experiential learning in particular disciplines;

- evidence of training and development of those who evaluated experiential learning for college credit; or

- review of the acceptance in transfer of the awarding institution's evaluated experiential learning credit.

Non-credit Offerings

Non-credit offerings may be offered on-site and through distance education modalities. To the extent that non-credit offerings are an important part of an institution's activities, they should be consistent with its mission and goals. Whether these offerings are internally or externally developed, appropriately qualified professionals with responsibility to the institution should have oversight for the design, delivery, and evaluation of such offerings. If non-credit courses are potentially applicable to for-credit programs at the institution, academic oversight should assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses.

Fundamental Elements of Non-credit Offerings

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- non-credit offerings consistent with institutional mission and goals;

- clearly articulated program or course goals, objectives, and expectations of student learning that are designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures;

- academic oversight assures the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses, if courses completed within a non-credit or certificate program are applicable to a degree program offered by the institution; and

- periodic assessment of the impact of non-credit programs on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ evidence of the rationale for non-credit offerings, including the demonstrated consistency of non-credit offerings with the institution's stated mission and goals;

➢ evidence of articulated student knowledge, skills, and/or competency levels for non-credit offerings;

➢ evidence of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the design, delivery, and evaluation of non-credit offerings; or

➢ review of assessment results for non-credit programs.

Branch Campuses, Additional Locations, And Other Instructional Sites

(Including Business/Corporate Locations and Study Abroad)

Educational offerings at branch campuses, additional locations, or other instructional sites—including study abroad locations and business/corporate locations—may extend learning opportunities to a variety of populations, some of which are not otherwise served by the institution. Programs so delivered should meet standards comparable to those of other institutional offerings.

Fundamental Elements of Branches, Additional Locations, and Other Instructional Sites

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ offerings at branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites (including study abroad locations and programs offered at business/corporate sites) that meet standards for quality of instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness comparable to those of other institutional offerings;

➢ activities and offerings at other locations meet all appropriate standards, including those related to learning outcomes;

➢ adequate and appropriate support services; and

➢ periodic assessment of the impact of branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ review of detailed information on all sites/locations, including initial date of operation, programs offered, student profile, faculty profile, administrative profile, physical and technological resources;

➢ analysis of the adequacy and appropriateness of library/information and other learning resources;

➢ analysis of the adequacy of other resources for these sites (e.g., technology);

➢ analysis of site-specific outcomes assessment data and related conclusions about effectiveness and comparability to similar offerings elsewhere at the institution; or

➢ review of the participation of site faculty and other personnel in institution-wide processes of evaluation, planning, and governance.

Distance Education, Distributed Learning, and Correspondence Education

Distance education or distributed learning is a formal educational process that uses technology to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include the Internet, one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communication devices; audioconferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs if used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed.

Correspondence education differs from distance education. As defined in Federal regulation, correspondence education is provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.

Programs delivered through either distance education or correspondence education modalities— whether by the Internet, television, video-conferencing, or other means—should meet academic and learning support standards, appropriate to the type of delivery, comparable to those offered in more traditional formats within higher education. Student learning objectives and outcomes should be consistent across comparable offerings, regardless of where or how they are provided.

Institutions offering programs through distance education modalities also should take appropriate steps to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. Institutions may utilize various technologies or other means, such as a secure login and passcode, proctored exams, or other technologies or practices that are effective in order to verify student identity.

Fundamental Elements of Distance Education, Distributed Learning, and Correspondence Education

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

➢ distance education or correspondence education offerings (including those offered via accelerated or self-paced time formats) that meet institution-wide standards for quality of instruction, articulated expectations of student learning, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness. If the institution provides parallel on-site offerings, the same institution-wide standards should apply to both;

➢ consistency of the offerings via distance education or correspondence education with the institution's mission and goals, and the rationale for the distance education delivery;

➢ planning that includes consideration of applicable legal and regulatory requirements;

➢ demonstrated program coherence, including stated program learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded;

➢ demonstrated commitment to continuation of offerings for a period sufficient to enable admitted students to complete the degree or certificate in a publicized time frame;

➢ assurance that arrangements with consortial partners or contractors do not compromise the integrity of the institution or of the educational offerings;

➢ validation by faculty of any course materials or technology-based resources developed outside the institution;

- ➢ a system of student identity verification that ensures that the student who participates in class or coursework is the same student who registers and receives academic credit; that students are notified at the time of registration or enrollment of any additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity; and that the identity verification process protects student privacy;

- ➢ available, accessible, and adequate learning resources (such as a library or other information resources) appropriate to the offerings at a distance;

- ➢ an ongoing program of appropriate orientation, training, and support for faculty participating in electronically delivered offerings;

- ➢ adequate technical and physical plant facilities, including appropriate staffing and technical assistance, to support electronic offerings; and

- ➢ periodic assessment of the impact of distance education on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ➢ review of institutional support for faculty participation in the design, development, and delivery of academic offerings at a distance;

- ➢ analysis of partnerships with other institutions to offer or accept offerings at a distance, to assure consistency with the institution's general policies regarding such partnerships or consortia and to assure the integrity of the degree-granting institution;

- ➢ evidence that students have appropriate hardware and the technology skills and competencies needed to succeed in the distance education environment of the institution;

- ➢ analysis of the appropriateness and effectiveness of student services available to students at a distance (admissions, financial aid, registration, advisement, counseling, tutoring, placement, etc.);

- ➢ review of published materials, including analysis of the extent to which there is a complete and accurate description of the instructional delivery systems utilized, learning formats, prerequisites for participation, expected learning, and completion and any other requirements;

- ➢ analysis of the adequacy of the institution's technological infrastructure to support the resource needs of distance education activities, and consideration of how learning outcomes determine the technology being used;

- ➢ analysis of the adequacy of technological assistance and support to both student and faculty in distance education;

- ➢ evidence of how the institution assures that students and faculty have sufficient technological skills and those information literacy skills that are necessary to access and to use effectively the information resources available at a distance;

- ➢ analysis of institutional processes to evaluate the appropriateness, efficiency, and effectiveness of its distance education operations; or

- ➢ review of articulated expectations for and the effectiveness of interaction between faculty and students and among students.

Contractual Relationships And Affiliated Providers

As institutions seek to improve the ways in which they provide education to their students, they may find it more practical or efficient to enter into consortial arrangements or contractual relationships with other institutions or organizations to provide certain aspects of the education experience, including faculty, recruitment of students, and course/program development. Because an accredited institution is responsible for all activities carried out in the institution's name, the Commission's accreditation standards, policies, and procedures—including those on outcomes assessment, advertising, and recruitment—are fully applicable to any contractual arrangements with another regionally accredited institution or with a non-regionally accredited organization. Contractual relations with for-profit firms or other institutions require diligent care to protect an institution's integrity and to avoid abuse of its accredited status.

An affiliated provider may be a subsidiary, parent, "sister" or other entity (for-profit or non-profit) legally related to the institution or unrelated (except through contractual arrangement) to the accredited institution. Depending on the specific relationship, such providers may or may not be included within the scope of the institution's accreditation. Relevant factors might include matters such as use of the same or similar names, ownership, incorporation, management, control of curricula, finances, acceptance of credits, degree-granting authority, and extent of activities. However, whether or not the affiliate is included within the scope of the institution's accreditation, the nature of the affiliation should be made clear both to the Commission and to the public, with particular attention to such issues as whether the provider offers its own programs or grants its own degrees; whether students are distinct from or considered to be students of the parent institution; what student learning and support services are available; and whether courses offered by the affiliated provider are applicable to a degree program offered by the accredited institution.

Attention should be given to the impact of the affiliated entity on the institution's resources and the institution's ability to fulfill its mission and goals.

Fundamental Elements of Contractual Relationships and Affiliated Providers

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- ➢ contractual relationships with affiliated providers, other institutions, or organizations that protect the accredited institution's integrity and assure that the institution has appropriate oversight of and responsibility for all activities carried out in the institution's name or on its behalf;

- ➢ consistency of any course or program offered via contractual arrangement with the institution's mission and goals; and

- ➢ adequate and appropriate accredited institutional review and approval of work performed by a contracted party in such functional areas as admissions criteria, appointment of faculty, content of courses/programs, instructional support resources (including library/information resources), evaluation of student work, and outcomes assessment.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

- ➢ review of documentation of the expressed purposes, roles, and scope of operation for the affiliated entity, including whether the entity offers its own separate courses, programs, or degrees in its own name;

- ➢ evidence of the extent to which the affiliated entity is separate from or part of the accredited institution, including relevant factors such as faculty, other personnel, processes, ownership, management, and governance;

- ➢ evidence of published public information that clearly and accurately represents the contractual relationship between the institution and the other entity;

- ➢ evidence of provision of appropriate protection for enrolled students in the event a contract is terminated or renegotiated;

- ➤ review of student profile, including whether students of the affiliated entity are considered to be students of the accredited institution or are eligible for financial aid;

- ➤ analysis of the involvement of the institution's own faculty and other qualified academic professionals in the development and review of curriculum offered through the contractual arrangement;

- ➤ analysis of the involvement of faculty and other qualified academic professionals in validating the quality of course materials or resources (technology-based, etc.) developed by those external to the provider and the institution;

- ➤ assessment of the effectiveness and appropriateness of student learning and support services provided by the affiliated entity and/or the primary institution;

- ➤ if courses or programs offered as its own by the affiliated entity may be applied to a degree offered by the institution, evidence of academic oversight to assure the comparability and appropriate transferability of such courses; or

- ➤ analysis of the impact of the contractual arrangement on the institution's resources (human, fiscal, physical, etc.) and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission and goals.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

Context

Assessment of student learning may be characterized as the third element of a four-step teaching-learning-assessment cycle:

1. Developing clearly articulated written statements, expressed in observable terms, of key learning outcomes: the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students are expected to exhibit upon successful completion of a course, academic program, co-curricular program, general education requirement, or other specific set of experiences, as discussed under Standard 11 (Educational Offerings);

2. Designing courses, programs, and experiences that provide intentional opportunities for students to achieve those learning outcomes, again as discussed under Standard 11;

3. Assessing student achievement of those key learning outcomes; and

4. Using the results of those assessments to improve teaching and learning.

This standard on assessment of student learning builds upon Standards 11 (Educational Offerings), 12 (General Education), and 13 (Related Educational Offerings), each of which includes assessment of student learning among its fundamental elements. This standard ties together those assessments into an integrated whole to answer the question, "Are our students learning what we want them to learn?" Self-studies can thus document compliance with Standard 14 by summarizing the assessments of Standards 11 through 13 into conclusions about overall achievement of the institution's key student learning outcomes.

Because student learning is at the heart of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness (see Standard 7: Institutional Assessment), which additionally monitors the environment provided for teaching and learning and the achievement of other aspects of the institution's mission, vision, and strategic goals and plans.

The fundamental question asked in the accreditation process is, "Is the institution fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals?" This is precisely the question that assessment is designed to answer, making assessment essential to the accreditation process. Assessment processes help to ensure the following:

- Institutional and program-level goals are clear to the public, students, faculty, and staff;
- Institutional programs and resources are organized and coordinated to achieve institutional and program-level goals;
- The institution is providing academic opportunities of quality;
- The institution is indeed achieving its mission and goals; and
- Assessment results help the institution to improve student learning and otherwise advance the institution.

Assessment is not an event but a process that is an integral part of the life of the institution, and an institution should be able to provide evidence that the assessment of student learning outcomes and use of results is an ongoing institutional activity. While some of the impact of an institution on its students may not be easily or immediately measured—some institutions, for example, aim for students to develop lifelong habits that may not be fully developed for many years—the overall assessment of student learning is expected whatever the nature of the institution, its mission, the types of programs it offers, or the manner in which its educational programs are delivered and student learning facilitated.

While the Commission expects institutions to assess student learning, it does not prescribe a specific approach or methodology. The institution is responsible for determining its expected learning outcomes and strategies for achieving them at each level (institutional, program, and course), assessment approaches and methodologies, sequence, and time frame. These may vary, based on the mission, goals, organization, and resources of the institution. Whatever the approach, effective assessment processes are useful, cost-effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained.

Useful assessment processes help faculty and staff make appropriate decisions about improving programs and services, developing goals and plans, and making resource allocations. To assist with interpretation and use of assessment results, assessment measures and indicators have defined minimally acceptable performance targets. Because institutions, their students, and their environments are continually evolving, effective assessments cannot be static; they must be reviewed periodically and adapted in order to remain useful.

Cost-effective assessment processes are designed so that their value is in proportion to the time and resources devoted to them. To this end, institutions can begin by considering assessment measures already in place, including direct evidence such as capstone projects, field experience evaluations, and performance on licensure examinations and indirect evidence such as retention and graduation rates and alumni surveys. New or refined measures can then be added for those learning outcomes for which direct evidence of student learning is not already available, concentrating on

the most important institutional and program-level learning outcomes. Effective assessments are simple rather than elaborate and may focus on just a few key goals in each program, unit, and curriculum.

Reasonably-accurate and truthful assessment processes yield results that can be used with confidence to make appropriate decisions. Such assessment processes have the following characteristics:

⬦ Because there is no one perfectly accurate assessment tool or strategy, institutions should use multiple kinds of measures to assess goal achievement. Assessments may be quantitative and/or qualitative and developed locally or by an external organization.

⬦ Assessment tools and strategies should be developed with care; they should not be not merely anecdotal information nor collections of information that happen to be on hand.

⬦ Student learning assessment processes should yield direct—clear, visible, and convincing—evidence of student learning. Tangible examples of student learning, such as completed tests, assignments, projects, portfolios, licensure examinations, and field experience evaluations, are direct evidence of student learning. Indirect evidence, including retention, graduation, and placement rates and surveys of students and alumni, can be vital to understanding the teaching-learning process and student success (or lack thereof), but such information alone is insufficient evidence of student learning unless accompanied by direct evidence. Grades alone are indirect evidence, as a skeptic might claim that high grades are solely the result of lax standards. But the assignments and evaluations that form the basis for grades can be direct evidence if they are accompanied by clear evaluation criteria that have a demonstrable relationship to key learning goals.

Planned assessment processes that clearly and purposefully correspond to learning outcomes that they are intended to assess promote attention to those goals and ensure that disappointing outcomes are appropriately addressed.

Organized, systematized, and sustained assessment processes are ongoing, not once-and-done. There should be clear interrelationships among institutional goals, program- and unit-level goals, and course-level goals. Assessments should clearly relate to important goals, and improvements should clearly stem from assessment results.

As noted earlier, because student learning is a fundamental component of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness. An institution may therefore create institutional effectiveness documentation that includes a component on assessing student learning (see Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning), or it may create a bridge between two separate sets of documentation, one for the assessment of student learning and one for other aspects of institutional effectiveness.

The improvement of overall educational quality and the enhancement of effective teaching and learning is most likely to occur when faculty and administrators work together to implement a sound, institution-wide program of assessment. Because the faculty guide decisions about curriculum and pedagogy, the effective assessment of student learning is similarly guided by the faculty and supported by the administration.

A commitment to assessment of student learning requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use. Assessment information, derived in a manner appropriate to the institution and its desired academic outcomes, should be available to and used by those who develop and carry out strategies that will improve teaching and learning.

Assessment results should also be used to evaluate the assessment process itself, leading to modifications that improve its relevance and effectiveness.

Fundamental Elements of Assessment of Student Learning

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities.

> - clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes (see Standard 11: Educational Offerings), at all levels (institution, degree/program, course) and for all programs that aim to foster student learning and development, that are:
>   - appropriately integrated with one another;
>   - consonant with the institution's mission; and
>   - consonant with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;
> - a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process to evaluate and improve student learning that meets the following criteria:
>   - systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures that:
>   - maximize the use of existing data and information;
>   - clearly and purposefully relate to the goals they are assessing;
>   - are of sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions; and
>   - include direct evidence of student learning;
>   - support and collaboration of faculty and administration in assessing student learning and responding to assessment results;
>   - clear, realistic guidelines and timetable, supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources;
>   - sufficient simplicity, practicality, detail, and ownership to be sustainable; and

- periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution's student learning assessment processes;

➢ assessment results that provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes;

➢ evidence that student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and is used to improve teaching and learning; and

➢ documented use of student learning assessment information as part of institutional assessment.

Institutions and evaluators must consider the totality that is created by the fundamental elements and any other relevant institutional information or analysis. Fundamental elements and contextual statements should not be applied separately as checklists. Where an institution does not possess or demonstrate evidence of a particular Fundamental Element, the institution may demonstrate through alternative information and analysis that it meets the standard.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

In addition to the evidence inherent within or necessary to document the fundamental elements above, the following, although not required, may facilitate the institution's own analysis relative to this accreditation standard:

➢ analysis of institutional support for student learning assessment efforts, including:

- written statements of expectations for student learning assessment work;

- policies and governance structures to support student learning assessment;

- administrative, technical, and financial support for student learning assessment activities and for implementing changes resulting from assessment; and

- professional development opportunities and resources for faculty to learn how to assess student learning, how to improve their curricula, and how to improve their teaching;

➢ analysis of the clarity and appropriateness of standards for determining whether key learning outcomes have been achieved;

➢ evidence of workable, regularized, collaborative institutional processes and protocols for ensuring the dissemination, analysis, discussion, and use of assessment results among all relevant constituents within a reasonable schedule;

- ➢ analysis of the use of student learning assessment findings to:
  - o assist students in improving their learning;
  - o improve pedagogies, curricula and instructional activities;
  - o review and revise academic programs and support services;
  - o plan, conduct, and support professional development activities;
  - o assist in planning and budgeting for the provision of academic programs and services;
  - o support other institutional assessment efforts (see Standard 7: Institutional Assessment) and decisions about strategic goals, plans, and resource allocation; and
  - o inform appropriate constituents about the institution and its programs;
- ➢ analysis of evidence that improvements in teaching, curricula, and support made in response to assessment results have had the desired effect in improving teaching, learning, and the success of other activities;
- ➢ analysis of the institutional culture for assessing student learning, including:
  - o the views of faculty and institutional leaders on assessment;
  - o faculty members' understanding of their roles in assessing student learning;
  - o the quality and usefulness of institutional support for student learning assessment efforts;
  - o campus-wide efforts to encourage, recognize, and value efforts to assess student learning and to improve curricula and teaching;
  - o evidence of collaboration in the development of statements of expected student learning and assessment strategies;
- ➢ evidence that information appropriate to the review of student retention, persistence, and attrition, is used to reflect whether these are consistent with student and institutional expectations [also included in Standard 8 Optional Analyses];
- ➢ evidence of the utilization of attrition information to ascertain characteristics of students who withdraw prior to attaining their educational objectives and, as appropriate, implementation of strategies to improve retention [also included under Optional Analyses in Standard 8];
- ➢ analysis of teaching evaluations, including identification of good practices; or
- ➢ analysis of course, department or school reports on classroom assessment practices and their outcomes, including grading approaches and consistency.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education Mission Statement

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that defines, maintains, and promotes educational excellence across institutions with diverse missions, student populations, and resources. The Commission is dedicated to quality assurance and improvement through accreditation via peer evaluation. Middle States accreditation instills public confidence in institutional mission, goals, performance, and resources through its rigorous accreditation standards and their enforcement.

Middle States Publications

Various documents supplement the 2006 edition of *Characteristics of Excellence,* describing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and its accreditation processes and practices. Many of these materials are available on the Commission's website (www.msche.org) and may be downloaded in PDF or as MSWord documents. Others may be purchased with the publications order form on the website.

There are several types of Commission publications:

Manuals on Accreditation Protocols

➢ For institutions seeking candidacy for accreditation

➢ For institutions planning for and engaged in self-study processes

➢ For evaluators and chairs of visiting teams

➢ For institutions preparing and reviewers evaluating periodic review reports

➢ For institutions requesting collaborative evaluations by the Commission and specialized accrediting agencies

Guidelines for Institutional Improvement

➢ The assessment of overall institutional effectiveness and the assessment of student learning in particular, with a free summary available online

➢ The integration of information literacy across the curriculum to develop research and communication skills

➢ Best practices for distance education or distributed learning

➢ Best practices for student outcomes assessment

Commission Policies and Procedures

➢ Current policy, procedural, and advisory statements

Other Materials

➢ An on-line searchable directory of member and candidate institutions

➢ The Commission's newsletter, archived and searchable on the website

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