Outcomes Assessment

The Commission on Higher Education reaffirms its expectation that institutions should develop guidelines and procedures for assessing overall institutional effectiveness, with primary attention given to the assessment of student learning outcomes, which are fundamental to the accreditation process.

While the Commission expects institutions to engage in outcomes assessment, it does not prescribe a specific approach or methodology. The approach and methodology to be employed are institutional prerogatives and may vary, based on the stated mission, goals, objectives and resources of the institution. Nevertheless an institution engaged in self-study or periodic review should provide evidence that the assessment of outcomes, particularly learning outcomes, is an ongoing institutional activity.

Outcomes assessment is not an end; it should be a means by which an institution utilizes data to improve teaching and learning and for overall institutional improvement. Therefore, faculty, administrative staff and others should be involved in the assessment process. Information obtained through assessment should be used as a basis for assessing the institution’s effectiveness in achieving its stated goals for institutional improvement and self-renewal.

In addition, outcomes assessment should be linked to an institution’s ongoing planning and resource allocation processes. Consequently, evidence gathered about student development and learning outcomes can be used to make judgements about resource allocation in planning for overall institutional effectiveness and to enhance academic programs.

The Commission has long challenged its member institutions to pursue excellence, and it understands that the purpose of outcomes assessment is twofold: improvement and accountability. Now more than ever, external forces and internal priorities require institutions of higher education to demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency to students and to the broader public as well. The improvement of overall educational quality and the enhancement of effective teaching and learning will occur when faculty and administrators work together to implement a sound, institution-wide program of outcomes assessment.

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