

### **Criterion Three: Core Component 3a**

***The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.***

In crafting this Core Component, the Commission unambiguously embedded into its accreditation program its decade-long program to challenge affiliated organizations to create a culture of assessment. An organization needs to be accountable to itself and to its constituencies, to be clear about what it intends students to know and to do, and to find ways of learning whether, as a result of the education provided, students actually know and can do. The culture of assessment ought to extend to all education and training provided by the organization, not simply to the degree programs it offers. The Commission's ongoing commitment to this work is explained in its **Statement on Assessment of Student Learning**.

Learning occurs in a variety of settings and at various stages of life. Significance should be placed on evidence that is provided to show what a student has learned and what he/she can do because of the learning. Such an understanding provides a framework in which a variety of learning experiences—such as compressed or accelerated degree programs, learning in asynchronous settings, and engaging in reflected learning—can be evaluated. In particular, the Commission expects institutions offering courses in accelerated, asynchronous, or other nontraditional formats to be especially diligent in documenting that students achieve the mastery of skills, competencies, and knowledge expected in established courses or traditional curricula or in keeping with predetermined learning outcomes.

Regardless of the circumstance, the credit hour remains an important means of quantifying study and learning and a mechanism by which institutions accept completed courses in transfer or assess and recognize prior learning. Higher education today requires new approaches to the way credit hours are assigned and awarded. The traditional Carnegie formula based heavily on the amount of seat time associated with a purported learning experience does not address current learning situations. How much students study inside or outside of formal classes, expectations associated with the course, student preparation, cogency of the learning experience, and pedagogical methods all contribute to the significance of a learning experience. Therefore, the Commission does not expect every institution to follow the traditional Carnegie formula, but it does require institutions that base their credit hour assignments on other factors to have policies that explain and justify how they consistently reach sound decisions about how to recognize college learning.

Assessment of student learning is a process, and the process must have results foundational to the education of students.

- The results should testify to achievement of stated goals for learning.
- The results should enable the organization to strengthen and improve the capacity for student learning.
- The results should have credibility with the faculty responsible for creating effective learning environments.
- The results should have such credibility that they shape budgeting and planning priorities.

While the Core Component identifies the outcomes of strong assessment, the proposed evidence includes tested best practices in assessment as a means to achieve those outcomes.

#### ***Examples of Evidence***

*As it defines and interprets evidence related to this Core Component, an organization may wish to consider the following Examples of Evidence.*

- *The organization clearly differentiates its learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate programs by identifying the expected learning outcomes for each.*
- *Assessment of student learning provides evidence at multiple levels: course, program, and institutional.*
- *Assessment of student learning includes multiple direct and indirect measures of student learning.*
- *Results obtained through assessment of student learning are available to appropriate constituencies, including students themselves.*
- *The organization integrates into its processes for assessment of student learning and uses the data reported for purposes of external accountability (e.g., graduation rates, passage rates on licensing exams; placement rates; transfer rates).*
- *The organization's assessment of student learning extends to all educational offerings, including credit and noncredit certificate programs.*
- *Faculty are involved in defining expected student learning outcomes and creating the strategies to determine whether those outcomes are achieved.*
- *Faculty and administrators routinely review the effectiveness of the organization's program to assess student learning.*