



# EVALUATOR TRAINING MODULES

## STUDENT SERVICES

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## MODULE 1: OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION

### ***Module Focus:***

**Describe** the philosophy and concept of self-regulation in higher education

**Define** accreditation, its purposes, and characteristics

**Discuss** the scope and mission of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

### ***Learning Outcomes:***

- Describe self-regulation in higher education
- Describe higher education accreditation as both a process and product
- Describe the geographic region and types of institutions comprising the membership of SACSCOC

### ***Accreditation Philosophy and Purpose: An Overview***

Accreditation in the United States is a voluntary mechanism of the higher education community. It plays a significant role in:

- fostering public confidence in the educational enterprise,
- maintaining standards,
- enhancing institutional effectiveness, and
- improving higher education by establishing a common set of requirements with which accredited institutions must comply.

Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions. Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements. Accreditation is based upon a peer review process whereby institutional effectiveness and quality are evaluated primarily by individuals from member institutions. Thus, the success of the reaffirmation process depends on the following four paramount concepts.

- The accreditation process is conducted by peer evaluators whose professional expertise, experience, and informed understanding of the issues enable them to apply their professional judgment in a reasonable and responsible manner.
- Committees, institutions, and the accrediting agency are all parties to the peer review process. They operate with integrity and maintain a relationship of trust and forthrightness.
- All parties are committed to quality enhancement and continuous improvement.
- The institution supports and enhances student learning within the context of its mission.

Accreditation is both a *process* and a *product* that relies on:

- integrity,
- thoughtful and principled judgment,
- rigorous application of requirements commonly accepted best practices, and
- context of trust.

The *process* of accreditation is based upon reasoned judgment and stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public. The *process* of accreditation provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services.

The *product* of accreditation is a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements of the membership of the accreditation association. The statement of an institution's accreditation status with the Commission is also an affirmation of an institution's continuing commitment to the Commission's principles and philosophy of accreditation.

### ***Accreditation Association:***

Major U. S. accreditation organizations were formed over a century ago and have evolved in response to the needs of educational institutions and society. Accreditation associations are organized at regional, national, and professional levels, and they collectively represent the higher education community.

Although the members of each accreditation association establish requirements unique to their institutions, all have the following characteristics:

- The members determine the specific membership requirements.
- Each institution conducts a comprehensive analysis of its compliance with the association's requirements.
- An evaluation committee conducts an evaluation of the institution's case.
- Elected representatives of the association review and determine the institution's accreditation status.

Accreditation associations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education complete a comprehensive and rigorous review process to ensure that they are operating within the Department's regulations. In addition, the accrediting community established an umbrella organization called the Council for Higher Education Accreditation that brings the associations together to address common interests. Although accreditation associations utilize different review processes, they all share the belief that evaluators can apply qualified collective professional judgment to evidence presented by an institution and assess compliance with the accreditation community's requirements.

### ***The Role of SACSCOC***

The SACSCOC is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. The Commission's mission is the enhancement of educational quality throughout the region and the improvement of the effectiveness of institutions by ensuring that they meet standards established by the higher education community that address the needs of society and students. SACSCOC serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Latin America and other international sites approved by the Commission on Colleges that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees. The Commission also accepts applications from other international institutions of higher education.

SACSCOC supports:

- the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission,
- the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely, and
- the right of students to access opportunities for learning and for the open exchange of ideas.

However, exercise of these rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

The Commission on Colleges bases its accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions and entities on requirements in the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. SACSCOC member institutions through their voting delegates develop, amend, and approve requirements and standards included in the *Principles of Accreditation*.

The Commission expects institutions to enhance the quality of programs and services and create an environment in which **teaching and learning, public service, and research** occur in a manner appropriate to each institution's mission. At the heart of SACSCOC's philosophy of accreditation is the concept of quality enhancement and the presumption that each member institution is engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Each institution is expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all of its programs and services. These key assumptions along with the *Principles* guide SACSCOC review committees as they conduct institutional evaluations.

## MODULE 2: THE ROLE OF THE EVALUATION COMMITTEE IN THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS

### **Module Focus:**

**Describe** key components of the accreditation review process and the role of evaluation committees within the SACSCOC accreditation review process

**Provide** an overview of the types of evaluation committees within the SACSCOC accreditation review process

**Outline** the time involved in preparing for and participating on an evaluation committee

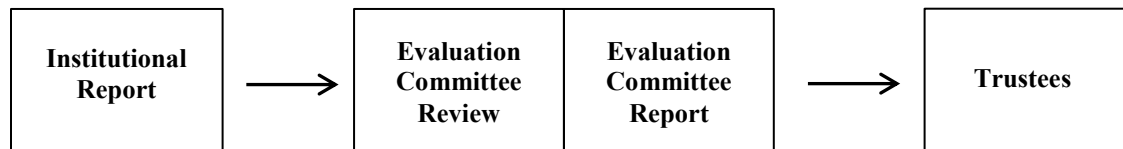
**Explain** the tasks of members of the evaluation committees

### **Intended Learning Outcomes:**

- Articulate the roles of the different evaluation committees within the accreditation review process
- Identify the purpose of evaluation committees within the accreditation review process
- Identify the types of evaluation committees within the accreditation review process
- Demonstrate an awareness of the amount of time required to prepare for and participate on evaluation committees
- Discuss the evaluator's tasks during each phase of an evaluation committee's work

### **Overview of the Accreditation Review Process and Purpose of Evaluation Committees**

The accreditation review process is comprised of three separate components.



The process begins with the institution's assessment of its compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* requirements and concludes with the SACSCOC Trustees' decision about the institution's accreditation status. In the midst of that process, the peer evaluation committee serves as a bridge between the institution and the Trustees. All evaluation committees (with the exception of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee) interact with the institution while conducting their evaluations and developing reports of the institution's case for compliance.

It should be noted that the evaluation committee does not accredit the institution nor does it determine membership status with SACSCOC. Essentially, the evaluation committee functions as an advisory body to the seventy-seven SACSCOC Trustees who ultimately make the determination about the institution's accreditation status.

### **Purposes of Evaluation Committees**

The focus, size and composition of different types of evaluation committees vary depending on its reasons for reviewing an institution; however, all committees share the following three common purposes:

- Evaluate the extent to which the institution's case for compliance demonstrates that it is fulfilling the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*;
- Articulate and share the committee's judgments of the institution's case for compliance; and
- Inform and advise the SACSCOC Trustees regarding the extent to which the institution's case appeared to demonstrate its compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* at the time of the committee review.

### ***Responsibilities of an Evaluation Committee Member***

The overriding responsibility of each member of an evaluation committee is to conduct the evaluation in an informed, collegial, professional and objective manner according to the purpose or charge to the committee. All committee members are expected to:

- base evaluations on an informed understanding of the institution (including its mission) and the specific accreditation requirements within the *Principles of Accreditation*;
- exercise due diligence in accessing and assessing all available information necessary for analyzing the institution's case;
- demonstrate personal and professional integrity in all dealings with the institution and the committee;
- conduct analyses of the institution in an objective manner; and
- maintain confidentiality about the institution and the work of the committee.

In essence, the value of the evaluation committee to all parties is dependent on the integrity, professional behavior and quality of analysis demonstrated by each committee member.

### ***Types of Evaluation Committees***

Evaluators may be invited to participate on various types of evaluation committees. The size and composition of a committee varies. Depending on the focus of a particular committee, it may have as few as two or more than ten members. From the standpoint of the evaluator, it is more important to understand the scope of the responsibilities on the committee rather than the number of colleagues who will be joining in the review. A brief description of each committee type is provided. For a more comprehensive description of the committees listed below, refer to the SACSCOC web site, [http://www.sacscoc.org/committee\\_forms1.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/committee_forms1.asp).

**Candidacy Committee.** The Candidacy Committee visits an Applicant institution to verify compliance with the selected standards and requirements addressed in the Application for Membership.

**Accreditation Committee.** The Accreditation Committee visits a Candidate institution to verify compliance with the Principle of Integrity, the Core Requirements (except for 2.12 Quality Enhancement Plan), the Comprehensive Standards (except for 3.3.2 (Quality Enhancement Plan) and the Federal Requirements contained in *The Principles of Accreditation*.

**Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.** Composed of a Chair and evaluators for finance, institutional effectiveness, organization and administration, student support services, learning support services, and two or more evaluators for educational programs, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee completes the first review of the Compliance Certification developed by a member institution seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation. For more information about this committee see Part III of the *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation*.

**On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.** Composed of a minimum of seven members (the Chair and evaluators in the areas of organization/governance, faculty, educational programs, student support services, institutional effectiveness, and the Quality Enhancement Plan), the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visits a member institution seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation to complete the review of standards begun by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and to review the Quality Enhancement Plan. For information about this committee see Part V in the *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation*.

**Special Committee.** Special Committees are authorized by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees or by the President of SACSCOC to evaluate institutional circumstances determined to be indicative of a lack of compliance with SACSCOC standards, regulations, or policies. Further information is available in the Commission policy "Special Committee Procedures and Team Report" on the Commission's website.

**Substantive Change Committee.** Composed of a Chair and a number of evaluators whose expertise is appropriate for the significant departure of expansion under review, the Substantive Change Committee visits the institution to confirm whether the institution has maintained compliance with selected Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements relevant to the substantive change.

***Tasks for Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees***

The challenge of effectively preparing for and participating on an evaluation committee must not be underestimated. *Table 1* provides an overview of the range of an evaluator’s responsibilities and tasks before and during an Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee review. The tasks listed are not exhaustive; however, they present the range of responsibilities the evaluator assumes when accepting an invitation to participate on an evaluation committee. SACSCOC staff representatives and committee chairs are always available to provide more specific information about a committee member’s responsibilities.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee normally reviews the Compliance documents for no more than three institutions in a cluster. The committee members’ assignments will be the same for all institutions in the cluster. Committee members do not have contact with the institution on any matter related to the committee’s evaluation or the institution’s case for compliance.

Individuals are normally invited to participate on a committee approximately six to ten months prior to the dates of the scheduled visit. Typical time periods when committee members need to focus time and energy on various matters related to the committee review and/or their assignments and responsibilities are outlined in *Table 1*. The Committee Chair and/or the SACSCOC staff representative will initiate correspondence with the committee members bringing attention to the committee’s specific schedule of activities.

Table 1

***Tasks for Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee***

Preparing for the Off-Site Review (Before arriving to Atlanta, GA)	Conducting the Off-Site Review (Two-day Committee Meeting in Atlanta, GA)	Following the Off-Site Review
<p>3 - 4 months prior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on tasks</li> <li>● Participate in SharePoint Training</li> <li>● Participate in orientation conference call</li> </ul> <p>2 – 3 months prior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Receive committee assignments</li> <li>● Participate in committee conference calls</li> <li>● Receive schedules and other information related to the reviews</li> </ul> <p>1 – 2 months prior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Initiate scheduled review of institutions</li> <li>● Complete draft reports for each institution</li> <li>● Participate in committee conference calls</li> </ul> <p>1 – 4 weeks prior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete draft reports for each institution</li> <li>● Receive logistical information about the committee meeting from SACSCOC</li> </ul>	<p><u>Day 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Orientation of the schedule for reviewing the institutions in the Cluster</li> <li>● Begin review of institutions</li> </ul> <p><u>Day 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete the review of institutions</li> <li>● Finalize editorial changes for each institutional report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Submit expense voucher as directed by the SACSCOC staff representative (see <i>Expense Voucher</i> Section)</li> </ul>



### ***Tasks for All Committees Requiring an On-Site Evaluation***

Table 1 provided an overview of the tasks associated with an Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. Table 2 provides an overview of the tasks associated with all other types of evaluation committees conducting an on-site evaluation of an institution. Again, the tasks listed are not exhaustive; however, they present the range of responsibilities the evaluator assumes when accepting an invitation to participate on an evaluation committee. SACSCOC staff representatives and committee chairs are always available to provide more specific information about a committee member's responsibilities.

Table 2

### ***Tasks Associated with Other Evaluation Committees***

Prior to the committee review (2 - 6 weeks prior to the visit)	During the committee review	After the committee review (2 - 4 weeks after the visit)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarify the purpose of the committee review</li><li>• Review the <i>Principles of Accreditation</i> and identify the accreditation requirements that the committee will review</li><li>• Communicate with the Committee Chair and/or the SACSCOC Staff to obtain specific committee assignments, and to determine the logistics for the committee visit</li><li>• Determine through the Chair the procedures to follow when contacting the institution and other committee members. prior to the arrival on campus</li><li>• Become familiar with the institution's mission and its case for compliance</li><li>• Based on your preliminary analysis, identify issues, topics or questions that need to be addressed during committee visit</li><li>• Identify individuals the committee will need to meet and obtain additional information during the committee visit. Develop key questions that will guide the discussions.</li><li>• Determine a plan of action for use of time during the committee visit</li><li>• Develop a written draft of your section(s) of the report based on information provided in the institution's case for compliance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During the first committee meeting on site, be prepared to share your preliminary analysis of the institution's case for compliance, and to identify the issues/topics/questions you need to explore while on campus in order to reach closure on your judgment about the extent to which the institution establishes its compliance with the <i>Principles of Accreditation</i>.</li><li>• In consultation with the Committee Chair, determine who at the institution is most likely to have the information needed in order for you to complete your assignments</li><li>• Determine the institutional representative to contact for information and all other matters pertaining to the committee schedule, list requests for documentation and think about assistance needed to complete assignments.</li><li>• Confirm logistics for the committee review. Arrive on time and participate in all meetings of the committee as instructed by the Committee chair.</li><li>• Provide a clear and concise written report to the committee Chair before departing campus at the conclusion of the visit.</li><li>• Return all institutional documents to the institutional contact at the conclusion of the review. If additional documents are needed, obtain permission from the institution to keep them.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make any revisions to the committee report as instructed by the Committee Chair</li><li>• Submit expense voucher as directed by the SACSCOC staff representative (See <i>Expense Voucher</i> Section)</li></ul>

### ***Expense Reimbursement Form***

A committee member on any SACSCOC evaluation committee is to complete and submit an *Expense Reimbursement Form* for expenses incurred associated with the committee visit. The following procedures should be followed when submitting the form:

- EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT FORMS SHALL BE SUBMITTED **as soon as possible after** actual expenses have been incurred. **No reimbursement will be honored if submitted after 90 days of the incurred expense.**
- ORIGINAL RECEIPTS ARE REQUIRED. Attach **all** receipts for airline travel, baggage fees, car rentals, parking, hotel bills and meals.
- TRAVEL BY COMMON CARRIERS (airplane, train, bus, boat, etc.) will be reimbursed at the ROUNDTrip ECONOMY OR COACH CLASS RATE, plus the necessary expense to and from the place of departure of the common carrier.
- PERSONAL AUTOMOBILE MILEAGE usage, if requested, is authorized at the current IRS-approved rate by the most direct route. The maximum allowable reimbursement, including en route expenses, may not exceed the published roundtrip coach class air fare to and from the site of the meeting.
- CAR RENTAL requires advance authorization by the Commission or institution.
- UNREIMBURSED EXPENSES include items not directly related to SACSCOC business, such as telephone calls, lodging and meals for family members and guests, movies, entertainment, etc.

To expedite the processing of a reimbursement, submit the form with seven days and make certain you have: (1) signed the form; (2) checked the totals; and (3) attached ALL receipts for airline travel, baggage fees, car rentals, parking, hotel bills and meals.

### ***Summary***

When individuals accept invitations to participate on evaluation committees, there is the expectation that they will make it a high priority and not to decide at the last minute that something else (except emergencies) precludes their availability to serve on the committee. There is no substitute for advance preparation and ongoing communication with other members of the committee as well as the SACSCOC staff. Such preparation enables the committee to provide an institution the highest level of quality analysis regarding its compliance with the Principles of Accreditation. The committee facilitates an evaluation review process that will be of value to the institution. Key points for every phase of the committee review process are:

- Know the institution(s), the purpose of the committee and your responsibilities;
- Develop and follow through on a clear plan for the review;
- Stay on task;
- Focus on major issues; and
- Remain committed to completing responsibilities in a timely manner.

As it is illustrated in *Tables 1* and *2* time is of essence. It is important that each individual on a committee dedicate sufficient time to prepare for the review while also developing and maintaining regular communication with various individuals associated with the review. It is also important to note that the committee's work does not always conclude at the end of its review of the institution.

## MODULE 3: THE EVALUATOR AND THE FORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

### **Module Focus:**

- Describe the desirable characteristics of a member of an evaluation committee
- Describe the process of forming of professional judgment about how well an institution makes a case for its compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*
- Provide examples of issues to consider and questions to explore in developing professional judgment

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Identify the characteristics of an effective SACSCOC member of an evaluation committee
- Recognize SACSCOC's term "professional judgment"
- Identify the components of the formation of professional judgment, and
- Identify pertinent questions and issues that guide the formation of professional judgment about an institution's compliance with accreditation requirements

### ***Characteristics of a Member of a SACSCOC Evaluation Committee***

Individuals are selected as members of the evaluation committee because their experiences and expertise in higher education represents a *goodness of fit* with a particular aspect of the institution being evaluated and the tasks of the evaluation committee. Members of an evaluation committee bring an applied understanding of the complexities of a particular area or multiple areas within institutions. These areas include:

- educational programs,
- student services,
- institutional effectiveness,
- libraries and information technology,
- distance learning,
- finance and facilities, and
- governance and administration.

The work of an evaluator is guided by the accreditation requirements adopted by the SACSCOC membership and the Commission's policies and procedures that are applicable to the scope of the particular committee review. The accreditation requirements adopted by the SACSCOC membership are contained in *The Principles of Accreditation*. Committee members also demonstrate an awareness of current issues, trends, and practices within the larger higher education community.

The quality of the committee member's contributions to the work of the committee is predicated on the following characteristics: integrity, expertise, communication skills, thoroughness, efficiency, objectivity and consistency, confidentiality, collegiality, and decisiveness.

### **Integrity**

The committee member demonstrates integrity by:

- making contributions to the work of the committee with professional and personal honesty and candor
- intentionally avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest
- forming an impartial, informed, and reasoned analysis of an institution's compliance with *The Principles*, and
- showing a commitment to the value of review and institutional enhancement

### Expertise

The committee member demonstrates expertise through:

- a knowledge about institutional complexities
- a mature awareness of his or her profession
- maintaining currency in his or her area of professional expertise
- experience in higher education, and
- understanding the requirements within the *Principles of Accreditation*

### Communication skills

The committee member demonstrates communication skills by:

- writing and speaking in a clear, coherent, concise, and cogent manner
- listening to others, and
- interacting with others in a professional, collegial, collaborative, and coherent manner

### Thoroughness

The committee member demonstrates thoroughness by:

- using due diligence in examining information provided by an institution
- having an ability to navigate electronic data
- having the capacity to synthesize large amounts of information, and
- making judgments predicated on data presented by an institution

### Efficiency

The committee member demonstrates efficiency by having the capacity to:

- assimilate and evaluate significant amounts of information in a compressed time period
- interpret material that may be poorly organized or difficult to locate, and
- prioritize work and focus on the most significant issues and data

### Objectivity and Consistency

The committee member demonstrates objectivity and consistency by having the ability to:

- evaluate all information without prejudging the institution's compliance, and
- apply requirements and standards evenly within the context of the institution's mission and the requirements of the Commission

### Confidentiality

The committee member demonstrates confidentiality by:

- having the capacity to handle information with confidentiality throughout the entire evaluation process, and
- understanding the constraints of sharing institutional information with others

### Collegiality

Collegiality in an accreditation review means that the committee member:

- acts as a professional colleague with other committee members and representatives of the institution being evaluated
- works in a collaborative manner with others, and
- makes cogent, informed, timely, and focused contributions to committee discussions

### Decisiveness

The committee member demonstrates the capacity to make decisions through:

- careful and thorough review of available and accessible evidence

- informed analysis of the institution's case, and
- informed and reasonable application of the *Principles of Accreditation* to the mission of the institution and the expectations of SACSCOC

### ***Evaluator's Professional Judgment***

Professional judgment about an institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* is based on:

- an understanding of the requirements of the *Principles*
- the capacity to apply the *Principles* within the context of an institution's mission and the scope of the evaluation committee's charge
- due diligence in examining an institution's case for compliance, and
- an awareness of the *expectations of SACSCOC and its member institutions*.

Based on these factors, professional judgment arises from the professional background of the committee member and the institution's case for compliance.

Thus, the evaluator's professional judgment is a product of a triangulation of:

- professional expertise and experience
- informed understanding of the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*
- the nature of the institution's case
- the capacity to establish a *goodness of fit* between the institution's mission and case, and
- knowledge of the generalized expectations of the membership of SACSCOC.

The judgment of the individual committee member regarding the extent to which an institution demonstrates its compliance with the accreditation requirements of SACSCOC is a thoughtful balance and weighing of those perspectives. In all instances the individual is searching for the preponderance of *evidence* that leads to the judgment. However, the development of the individual's professional judgment represents only part of the evaluation process. It is the task of the evaluation committee to receive and review the individual evaluator's analysis and findings as the committee collectively evaluates the institution's case.

The committee member's professional judgments are based on:

- the application of insights gained from professional background and experiences to the analysis of the institution's case for compliance and
- the capacity to develop informed and reasoned interpretation of the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation* as well as to conduct a thorough analysis of the institution's case against the unique mission of the institution rather than forming an idealized vision of the comparison of the institution against the committee member's home institution.

### ***Evaluation of the Institution's Case***

All committee members collaborate to evaluate how well an institution presents a compelling case for its compliance with *The Principles*. The committee member formulates and articulates a reasoned and reasonable basis for his or her professional judgment about the institution's compliance with SACSCOC requirements, policies, and procedures. However, that does not represent the Committee's collective judgment until all members thoroughly and rigorously vet the issues.

The starting point for the committee's discussion is a common understanding of the specific compliance components within the *Principles* as well as a shared understanding of expectations regarding the requirement. The committee also applies the *Principles* within the context of the mission of the institution as it examines the institution's case for compliance. In the formation of its judgment, the committee then recognizes there may be many different ways that institutions might demonstrate compliance with the requirement. The application of the *Principles* to the institution's case is not a *one size fits all* process.

In general, the Committee's review and deliberations are guided by discussion questions such as:

- What is the institution's assertion regarding its compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*?
- What is the basis for the institution's assertions made within its case?
- To what extent does the institution's evidence support its case?
- To what extent does the institution's case demonstrate its compliance with the *Principles* within the context of its institutional mission?
- What is the basis for the Committee's judgment?
- To what extent does the Committee's judgment appear to be consistent with or differ from the general expectations of SACSCOC and its member institutions?

### ***The Institution's Case***

The institution is responsible for presenting a comprehensive and compelling case of its compliance. The committee's task is to develop an overarching judgment of the institution's case as a whole, which is analogous to the sum being larger than the individual parts. While each of the components of an institution's case is vital, the committee's task is to weigh those components against one.

In this regard, the committee is always addressing the question of whether the institution's case (*assertion, evidence and analysis*) establishes its compliance with the requirement. That is, the committee weighs the information provided by the institution to determine whether the necessary information was presented. Additionally, the committee needs to determine whether the evidence presented by the institution stands the tests of evidence to conclude that it is sufficient to support the case.

- *The Institution's assertion of its Compliance*
  - The *Principles of Accreditation* provides institutions with considerable leeway in the interpretation of the extent to which they are meeting and exceeding the accreditation requirements with respect to their mission. Institutions assume primary responsibility for asserting the extent to which they meet those requirements.
    - When an institution concludes on the basis of its internal review that it is not in compliance with a requirement, then it is responsible for indicating the basis for that assertion as well as for presenting a means for establishing compliance. In some instances, an institution may present a time line, actions it will take and indicators it will use to evaluate its progress for establishing compliance.
- *The Institution's evidence*
  - The institution's case cannot stand without evidence to support the assertions. Insofar as the development of the committee's professional judgment is concerned, the absence or lack of relevant and representative institutional evidence will adversely affect the committee's judgment about the institution's case for compliance.
- *The basis of the Institution's claims*
  - While a case for compliance cannot stand without evidence, evidence by itself does not establish compliance. The institution is responsible for demonstrating the link between the evidence supporting its case, and the claim it is making regarding its compliance with the requirement. The institution is in essence saying "*the evidence demonstrates compliance because. . .* "

In evaluating the institution's case, the committee member:

- exercises due diligence in identifying the institution's assertion of the extent to which it meets the requirements of the *Principles*
- exercises due diligence in searching out and evaluating the evidence presented by the institution

- examines closely the institution's analysis of its case, as well as the links between the analysis and the evidence presented
- weighs the extent to which the institution's case appears reasonable, reasoned, and compelling, and
- evaluates and articulates the extent to which the institution's case demonstrates its compliance with the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*

Based on the analysis and evaluation conducted by individual committee members, the committee weighs the strengths of the institution's case in arriving at its collective judgments about the institution's compliance with the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

## MODULE 4: FOUNDATIONS OF STUDENT SERVICES

### **Module Focus:**

**Describe** key dimensions of evaluating an institution's case for its compliance with the requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation* bearing on the scope and type of student services provided by the institution.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Define Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements within the *Principles of Accreditation* pertaining to student services
- Explain the Case Analysis Factors (CAFs) a student services evaluator considers when judging an institution's case for compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*
- Articulate evaluation questions to guide review of institutional compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* pertaining to student services
- Delineate characteristics of cogent evidence and identify sample documentation normally reviewed to determine whether the institution establishes its case for compliance with selected accreditation requirements typically assigned to student services evaluators
- Discuss selected pointers for addressing student services in distance and correspondence education.

### **Student Services (SS) Requirements in *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement***

The following section highlights the accreditation requirements within the *Principles* that bear upon student services. The principles listed below are typically core requirements, comprehensive standards, and federal requirements that the student services evaluator will generally review; however, other members of the committee are also often involved in reviewing them.

Table 3 cross references requirements and standards that generally require the application of the professional expertise and experience of the student services evaluator with five types of evaluation committees. The sixth type of evaluation committee (Special Committee) may or may not involve issues related to student services as it focuses on specific issues at the institution.

Table 3

### **Typical Student Services Evaluator Responsibilities by Type of Committee**

<b>SS Evaluator Responsibilities</b>	<b>Candidacy Committee</b>	<b>Accreditation Committee</b>	<b>Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee</b>	<b>On-Site Reaffirmation: Committee</b>	<b>Substantive Change Committee</b>
<b><u>Primary Responsibilities as lead reviewer</u></b>	CR 2.10 FR 4.3 FR 4.5	CR 2.10 CS 3.3.1.3 CS 3.9.1 CS 3.9.2 CS 3.9.3 FR 4.3 FR 4.5	CR 2.10 CS 3.3.1.3 CS 3.9.1 CS 3.9.2 CS 3.9.3 FR 4.3 FR 4.5 FR 4.6	CR 2.10 CR 2.12.1 CS 3.3.1.3 CS 3.3.2 CS 3.9.1 CS 3.9.2 CS 3.9.3 FR 4.3 FR 4.5 FR 4.6	TBD (by the scope of review)
<b><u>Secondary Responsibilities as a support reviewer</u></b>	CR 2.5 FR 4.1	CR 2.5 CS 3.4.3 CS 3.4.9 CS 3.11.2 CS 3.11.3 FR 4.1 FR 4.8	CR 2.5 CS 3.4.3 CS 3.4.9 CS 3.11.2 CS 3.11.3 FR 4.1 FR 4.8	CR 2.5 CS 3.4. CS 3.4.9 CS 3.11.2 CS 3.11.3 FR 4.1 FR 4.8	



### ***Case Analysis Factors (CAF)***

Evaluating an institution's case for its compliance with SACSCOC requirements begins with an understanding of the critical factors that should be considered prior to an exploration of the institution's case. These critical factors or elements establishing the context for an effective and useful evaluation of the institution's case for compliance are referred to as the *Case Analysis Factors (CAFs)*. Case Analysis Factors include the data or other evidence that the evaluator needs to consider when analyzing an institution's case for its compliance.

#### **CAF 1 - Knowing and understanding the language of *The Principles of Accreditation***

Conducting an evaluation of an institution's case for its compliance with a specific core requirement, comprehensive standard or federal requirement begins with a careful reading of the requirement itself and examining specific compliance components contained in the requirements. For example, **Core**

**Requirement (CR) 2.10** states:

*The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that are intended to promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.*

In order to demonstrate its compliance with that requirement, the student services case needs to demonstrate that the institution provides services and programs that promote student learning. Note that for CR 2.10 the student services unit is responsible for making a case that demonstrates that its programs, services and activities *promote student learning*. In this specific context CR 2.10, it is **not** the responsibility of the student services unit to identify and assess learning outcomes since the institution is responsible for identifying and assessing its student learning outcomes (CS 3.3.1).

For example, a student services evaluator reviewed an institution's case for its compliance with CR 2.10 and concluded that the case was deficient because it provided a good description of the range of its programs and activities but did not include a set of the institution's student learning outcomes. Which of the following citations would seem most appropriate for the evaluator to make?

1. The institution needs to demonstrate that it has identified student learning outcomes.
2. The institution needs to demonstrate how its student services programs promote student learning.
3. Both 1 and 2.

A reasoned and reasonable evaluation of the institution's case is grounded in a clear understanding of the scope of the requirement the case addresses. In the example cited above, **the burden is on student services to demonstrate that its programs, services and activities promote the institution's student learning outcomes**. The burden of *identifying* the student learning outcomes and assessing the extent to which the outcomes are achieved lies with the larger institutional community (and is addressed in CS 3.3.1).

Another factor regarding the language of the *Principles* is that the document is intentionally crafted in a way that provides for a level of ambiguity. Such ambiguity gives institutions some flexibility in demonstrating their compliance with the requirement. For example, the student services requirements (Table 3) contain words such as "promote", "enhance", "appropriate", "qualified" and "adequate". Such language requires the application of the evaluator's reasoned and reasonable professional judgment when making determinations about the institution's compliance. It also requires the individual evaluator to be sensitive and flexible in the application of his or her knowledge and expertise to the case. The application of the *Principles* to an institution's case for compliance does not rest on the proposition that "one size fits all". The application of the *Principles* requires an understanding that there may be multiple ways in which institutions might make their cases. Knowledge of the language of the *Principles* and an understanding of the requirement itself is an essential first step in approaching the task of evaluating the extent to which the institution demonstrates its compliance.

## **CAF 2 - Knowledge of the Institution's Mission**

The institution's mission is the foundation for applying the *Principles*. It identifies the primary purpose(s) of the institution. The mission statement also serves as the framework for the broad institutional goals as well as the more focused goals established at various levels within the institution. SACSCOC affirms the institution's right to establish for itself its institutional mission; however SACSCOC also requires that the institution make a case that its mission is compatible with other member institutions within SACSCOC and in the higher education community.

Further, the institution must demonstrate that its range of programs and services are consistent with its mission. From the perspective of student services, the institution's mission is essential. Without a clear understanding of the institution's mission, student services evaluators cannot fully determine the extent to which those services are consistent with the institution's mission or support learning or enhance the development of the students.

## **CAF 3 - Understanding the Scope of the Evaluation Committee Review**

In addition to a consideration of CAFs 1 and 2, the evaluator needs to have a clear understanding of the purpose of the evaluation committee and the scope of its review because these factors guide the scope and focus of the review. For instance, if a Substantive Change Committee is conducting a review of a newly approved graduate program at an institution with a range of undergraduate programs, then the primary focus of the committee review will normally be on the application of the *Principles* as it pertains to the graduate program rather than a more broad review that includes undergraduate programs as well. Not all student services requirements within the *Principles* will necessarily apply to all evaluation committees (see *Table 3*).

For example, an Off-Site Committee will base its review on an examination of documentation provided by the institution for all applicable requirements within the *Principles*, except CR 2.12 and CS 3.3.2 (Quality Enhancement Plan) which is only evaluated by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. Additionally, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee has no interaction with the institution. An On-Site Committee builds on the work of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and may conduct a more focused review of the *Principles* based on the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. However, it will always include a review of CR 2.12 and CS 3.3.2 within its review. (See *Table 3*)

## **Evaluating Student Services Processes and Outcomes**

SACSCOC recognizes that institutions are unique; therefore, the manner in which an institution demonstrates its compliance will vary. Regardless of how an institution chooses to make its case, the following questions are typically raised by the student services evaluator:

- Does the institution state clearly its assertion of compliance with the requirement?
- If the institution asserts that it has not established compliance, does it provide a reasonable and responsible plan for establishing compliance?
- To what extent does the evidence provided by the institution support its assertion of compliance?
- To what extent does the analysis offered in the institution's case establish a link between the evidence presented and the institution's assertion?
- Does the institution's case establish the extent to which the institution is in compliance with the requirement?
- If the institution asserts that it has not established compliance, does it provide a reasonable and responsible plan for establishing compliance?

Further, each of the core requirements, comprehensive standards and federal requirements within the *Principles* has its own unique set of compliance components and a corresponding set of review questions. Therefore, the student services evaluator needs to formulate a series of questions for each requirement

that may guide the analysis of the strength of the institution's case. In addition, the evaluator should expect to review certain types of evidence when assessing the institution's compliance with the student services requirements. The section below presents (i) *examples* of questions to pose as well as (ii) *sample* evidence to expect pertaining to the institution's case for its compliance with selected student services requirements.

The examples within each requirement parallel those found in the *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation* (2012) which is focused on *sample* required as well as additional information institutions might be providing in their reports to evaluation committees. Each institution is unique, so the types of evidence presented by institutions may vary. For example, one institution might present a student handbook in support of a requirement, while another institution might produce a brochure or other publication to support its compliance with the requirement. Whether the two types of support vary is less important than the content of the support as long as there is evidence that the support is available and accessible to the constituencies; that those needing or desiring the support know of its existence and availability; and that the institution uses the appropriate documentation.

**CR 2.10** *The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What is the student body profile and do the student support programs and services provided by the institution serve all levels of students?
2. How do the student support programs and services effectively promote the mission of the institution for all students served by the institution?
3. How do students taking courses at off-campus instructional sites or taking distance and correspondence education courses access student support programs, services, and activities?

Sample evidence:

- Copies of the university mission statement and mission statements of student services units;
- Descriptions of the various student support programs and services;
- Narrative relating the student support services and programs to the mission of the institution;
- Description of processes used to determine student needs/interests and examples of recent changes in services made in response.

**CR 2.12** *The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. Has the institution identified and provided a clear and concise description of a significant issue(s) directly related to student learning or the environment supporting student learning?
2. What are the intended benefits of the QEP to the institution and to its student?
3. How does the QEP support the mission of the institution?
4. What assessment data were used for the selection of the topic?

Sample evidence:

- Evidence that student services and students actively participated in the identification and selection of the QEP topic;

- Evidence that student services and students actively participated in the selection of the student learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning to be addressed within the QEP.

CS 3.3.1.3 *The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: academic and student support services.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. Has the institution articulated expected outcomes for each educational support service?
2. How are expected outcomes clearly defined in measurable terms for each service?
3. What is the evidence of assessment activities for each service?
4. How does the institution's use of assessment results improve educational support services?
5. What assessment instruments were used and why were they selected? Were multiple assessment methods used? If so, describe.
6. If the institution used sampling, why were the sampling and findings an appropriate representation of the institution's educational support services?
7. What evidence does the institution have to demonstrate that student support services and programs effectively meet the need of students of all types and promote student learning and development?

Sample evidence:

- Definition of institution's student support services units;
- Copies of student services outcome statements for its programs, services and other activities intended to promote student learning and enhance student development;
- Descriptions of the means used to assess the achievement of the expected outcomes;
- Descriptions of the ways in which student services has used the findings from assessment to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of its program, services and activities;
- If sampling is used, (1) discussion of how the sampling is representative of the institution's mission, (2) documentation of a valid cross-section of programs, and a (3) case as to why sampling and assessment findings are an appropriate representation of the institution's programs.

CS 3.3.2 *The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What resources (personnel, financial, physical, academic, etc.) are necessary for the successful implementation of the QEP?
2. What are the goals of the institution's QEP and how does it plan to access the achievement of those goals?
3. How will the progress of the QEP be monitored? (timelines, administration and oversight of its implementation by qualified individuals, etc.)
4. What are the evaluation strategies identified by the institution that will determine the success of the institution's QEP? How will the evaluation findings be used to improve student learning?
5. How has the QEP been integrated into the institution's ongoing planning and evaluation processes?
6. How will the institution ensure adequate resources and sufficient expertise and experience to guide the implementation and completion of the project?

7. Who are the institution's constituencies and how have they been involved in the development of the QEP?

Sample evidence:

- Evidence that student services were involved in developing and will be involved in implementing and completing the QEP;
- Results of student services assessment data, including data from students, used to determine the QEP topic;
- QEP budget and descriptions of student services resources committed to the QEP.

CS 3.4.3 *The institution publishes admissions policies that are consistent with its mission.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What are the admission policies for the institution and for specific programs and how are they based on widely accepted standards for undergraduate and graduate applicants?
2. What evidence exists that admissions policies for the institution and for specific programs are consistent with the stated mission of the institution?
3. What evidence exists that the standards for admissions to the institution and specific programs are clear, reasonable, and consistently implemented?
4. How does the institution show that admission requirements are appropriate to identify qualified students who have the ability to complete a program successfully?
5. How does the institution disseminate admissions policies and are they uniform in all publications?
6. If admission policies differ for various delivery methods, what are the programs and why are they different?

Sample evidence:

- Admission policies of the institution
  - If the institution relies on system policies or state legislation requirements as a basis for student admissions, copies of those policies or legislative requirements;
  - Copies of the institution's policies covering general admissions as well as special admissions. Also, copies of admissions policies for those educational programs that stipulate admissions requirements different from or in addition to the institution's general admissions policies;
- Evidence that the institution has admissions policies in accordance with good practices in higher education;
- Evidence that the admissions policies are available and accessible to applicants and students
  - Undergraduate and graduate catalogs that include admission policies, standards, and procedures;
  - Institutional and specific program brochures and other recruitment materials or electronic resources stating admission policies and procedures;
- Documents describing how the institution evaluates applications and makes admission decisions to the institution and to programs;
- Minutes or other documents showing evidence that admission policies are implemented and enforced by the institution.

CS 3.4.9 *The institution provides appropriate academic support services.*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What academic support programs exist for faculty and students?

2. How does the institution ensure that its academic support programs and services are adequate and appropriate to the needs of its students and faculty?
3. How do they relate to the mission and to student and faculty needs?
4. How does the institution ensure that students and faculty have knowledge of and access to academic support programs, including distance learning and correspondence programs and off-campus instructional sites?

Sample evidence:

- Description of academic support services (e.g., tutoring, supplemental instruction, advising, learning centers, online learning resources, instructional/teaching support for faculty);
- Publications and websites explaining how academic support services are provided and how services can be accessed;
- Data on the frequency of usage of academic support services by students and faculty;
- Evidence that students earning credits at other locations or through other modalities (e.g., distance and correspondence education) have a comparable level of academic support services available to them;
- Surveys indicating that student and faculty academic support needs are being met.

***CS 3.9.1 The institution publishes a clear and appropriate statement of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement to the campus community.***

Sample questions for consideration:

1. How do student rights conform to sound educational principles practice and meet the needs of all undergraduate and graduate students served by the institution?
2. What are ways in which the institution ensures that students (including students enrolled in distance and correspondence education programs) as well as other constituencies of the institution are aware of student rights and responsibilities?
3. How are alleged violations and grievances regarding student rights and responsibilities handled?

Sample evidence:

- Copies of the statement of student rights and responsibilities;
- Documentation indicating where and how statements of student rights and responsibilities are disseminated to students (including students enrolled in distance and correspondence education programs) and the campus community.

***CS 3.9.2 The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records and maintains special security measures to protect and back up data.***

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What types of student records does the institution store?
2. What are the definitions, policies, and procedures governing the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records? How does the institution ensure that it adheres to these policies and procedures?
3. How does the institution manage the physical security of record storage?
4. How does the institution manage the security of electronic data storage systems, paper storage, and/or other storage?
5. What is the institution's disaster plan for records retrieval?
6. How does the institution ensure that faculty and staff understand and carry out the commitments to confidentiality, integrity, and security of student academic records?

Sample evidence:

- Documentation regarding student records that contains the following information: name of record; brief description of information in the record and a notation of whether it is in hard copy and/or electronic form; title of custodian; location of record;
- The policies and procedures governing student records, their security, integrity, and confidentiality, their use, and their release
  - Policies related to university records management;
  - Copies of policies/procedures related to student records confidentiality for services where students' medical or health records may be maintained;
  - Documents related to student requests to restrict or release directory information;
  - Copies of institutional guidelines regarding disposal of records
  - Copies of contracts with external parties related to records security
  - Examples of "Confidentiality" statements that employees sign
  - Copies of contracts with external parties related to IT/ Information security
- Security measures adopted by the institution that apply to the protection and backs up of data
  - Documentation of data back-up procedures;
  - Procedures for response to security breaches;
  - Other relevant documentation (e.g., types of firewalls, intrusion monitoring, firewall audit system, policies related to access, management of remote access, remote user policy, types of encryption, antivirus protection, user authentication, protection of data integrity, types of documents staff are required to read and sign related to information security);
- Publications used by students and personnel (a) that discuss student academic records, including statements addressing confidentiality of student records; and (b) that identify specific policies for the security of records and include statements about physical security of records, storage of records, back-up of records in both electronic and hard-copy, receipt of course grades, issuance of transcripts, etc.;
- Documentation that faculty and staff are trained regarding policies on the confidentiality, integrity, and security of student records.

**CS 3.9.3 *The institution employs qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs programs.***

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What are the various student support programs and services and how are they staffed?
2. What are the qualifications for student affairs personnel?
3. What are the training and professional growth opportunities for student affairs staff?
4. How does the institution demonstrate that the staff is sufficient to accomplish the mission?

Sample evidence:

- Roster of student affairs staff and documentation of their qualifications;
- Student affairs organizational chart;
- Position descriptions;
- Evidence that members of the student affairs staff have opportunities for professional growth and training and that they take advantage of them.



FR 4.3 *The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies.*

Sample question for consideration:

1. How does the institution make current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies available to students and other constituents?

Sample evidence:

- Publications that include information about academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies;
- Documentation indicating where and how this information is disseminated to students (including students enrolled in distance and correspondence education programs) and the public.

FR 4.5 *The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (See Commission policy “Compliant Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.”)*

Sample questions for consideration:

1. What are the policies and procedures governing student complaints and are they adequate to meet the needs of the students (including students enrolled in distance and correspondence education programs)?
2. How are the policies and procedures governing student complaints disseminated?
3. What is the evidence that the publicized policies and procedures are followed when resolving student complaints?
4. How does the institution retain a record of student complaints?

Sample evidence:

- Policies and procedures for addressing student complaints (including complaints of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education programs);
- Evidence that complaint policies and procedures are published and disseminated;
- Evidence that the published policies and procedures are followed when resolving student complaints;
- An example of a student complaint resolution (with sensitive information redacted);
- See CS 3.13 for additional information applicable to complaints<sup>1</sup>.

FR 4.6 *Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution’s practices and policies.*

Sample questions for consideration:

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to FR 4.5 addressing student complaints, the Commission’s “Complaint Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions” states: Each institution is required to have in place student complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well-publicized. (See FR 4.5). The Commission also requires, in accord with federal regulations, that each institution maintains a record of complaints received by the institution. This record is made available to the Commission upon request. This record will be reviewed and evaluated by the Commission as part of the institution’s decennial evaluation.

The Commission requires that institutions respond to the requirement of the policy statement by documenting compliance under CS 3.13.1 of the institution’s Compliance Certification or include documentation under FR 4.5. The Compliance Certification states that “when addressing this policy statement, the institution should provide information to the Commission describing how the institution maintains its record and also include the following: (1) individuals/offices responsible for the maintenance of the record(s), (2) elements of a complaint review that are included in the record, and (3) where the record(s) is located (centralized or decentralized). The record itself will be reviewed during the onsite evaluation of the institution.”

For FR 4.5 and CS 3.13 (as it applies to complaints), at the time of its review of an institution, the Commission will review (1) the acceptability of the complaint policy of the institution, (2) whether the institution follows its policy in the resolution of student complaints, and (3) the institution’s record of student complaints in the examination for patterns.



1. Do recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices, policies, and academic programs?
2. How does the institution ensure that its recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution?

Sample evidence:

- Copies (paper or electronic) of institutional and programmatic recruitment materials (e.g., booklets, pamphlets, presentations, videos, websites, emails);
- Description of the procedures the institution uses to ensure the ongoing accuracy of its recruitment presentations and materials.

### ***Types of Outcomes and Assessments: A Brief Overview***

SACSCOC broadly refers to an *outcome* as a measurable statement of something that the institution or program intends to accomplish. Institutions should define and interpret "outcome" in a manner consistent with an academic program or a given service unit's mission and role in the institution.

In evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the institution's student services programs and services, the evaluator might focus on the following different (yet, often, inter-related) types of outcomes:

- unit / program / service outcomes, and
- student learning and development outcomes.

This section of the module briefly discusses each of those types of outcomes and provides examples of types of issues, questions and evidence the evaluator may typically expect to encounter. The commonly used types of assessments for each of the outcome types are also outlined.

#### ***A. Unit / Program / Service Outcomes***

Institutions establish administrative units to meet specific needs. Not every institution will necessarily have an office of financial aid or a counseling center. In some instances, student services may be administratively combined with other units. Regardless of the institution's organizational pattern, the task of the evaluator is to determine how the institution's student services programs and functions are organized and determine what the specific outcomes are for each of the functional units.

The range and number of programs and services an institution provides for its students depend on the mission of the institution as well as its available resources. Examples of such programs would generally include orientation programs for in-coming students; counseling services; career placement; student activities and organizations. Depending on the population of students and their needs, many additional programs and services might be offered. In the context of CS 3.3.1, the evaluator should expect the institution to identify its intended outcomes for each of its student services programs and activities. Additionally, the evaluator should expect the institution to make its case for demonstrating that it has reasonable and reliable means of assessing the extent to which it achieves the intended outcomes and that it uses the results of those assessments to enhance the quality of those programs and services.

Institutions may rely on various measures for assessing the extent to which the program or services outcome is met. For example, an institution might provide a simple count of the number and frequency of its orientation programs or a statistical analysis of the number and type of students attending the orientation. It might also provide a comparative analysis of selected factors for those students attending versus students not attending.

#### ***B. Student Learning and Development Outcomes***

Documentation of the extent to which student services promotes the institution's student *learning* outcomes typically focuses on how student services assist students in their pursuit of new knowledge, skills and abilities. Documentation of the extent to which student services promotes student *development*

generally focus on the attitudes, values and dispositions that the institution wishes to promote in its students through the programs, services and/or activities provided by student services.

When evaluating whether the institution has identified outcomes for the programs and services offered, the typical key questions for the evaluator are:

- To what extent are the outcomes for its programs, services and activities promoting student learning and student development stated in measurable terms?
- By what means does the institution assess the extent to which it achieves its expected outcomes?
- To what extent does the institution use the results of its own assessments to maintain or enhance the quality of its student services?

Examples of commonly used direct and indirect means for assessing the extent to which an institution's student services promotes the institution's student learning and development outcomes include:

- Reflection essays and journals,
- Observations,
- Surveys and questionnaires,
- Interviews,
- Focus groups, and
- Self-evaluations.

Insofar as types of evidence are concerned, while both evidence of direct and indirect assessments are important and useful, they are not the same and generally do not carry the same weight in terms of establishing the institution's compliance with the requirements

#### ***Selected Pointers for Addressing Student Services in Distance and Correspondence Education***

The information in this section should be used in conjunction with the Commission policy "*Distance and Correspondence Education*" and "*Guidelines for Addressing Distance and Correspondence Education: A Guide for Evaluators.*"

There are several important expectations regarding student support service in the context of distance and correspondence education:

- Students have adequate access to the range of services appropriate to support the programs offered through distance and correspondence education (re: CR 2.10, CS 3.4.9, 3.9.3);
- Students in distance and correspondence education programs have an adequate procedure for resolving their complaints, and the institution follows its policies and procedures (re: CS 3.9.1, FR 4.5);
- Advertising, recruiting, and admissions information adequately and accurately represent the programs, requirements, and services available to students in distance and correspondence education programs (FR 4.6);
- Documented procedures assure that security of personal information is protected in the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results (re: CS 3.9.2, FR 4.8.2);
- Students enrolled in distance education courses are able to use the technology employed, have the equipment necessary to succeed, and are provided assistance in using the technology employed (re: CR 2.10, CS 3.4.9, 3.8.1, 3.8.2).
- The institution regularly assesses the effectiveness of its provision of student support services for distance or correspondence education students (re: CS 3.3.1.3).

Sample questions for consideration when evaluating institution's compliance with student services standards and requirements:

1. Has the institution made appropriate and necessary adjustments to ensure adequate student development services for students involved in distance learning programs?
  - Does the institution ensure that services are available? Is there a supervisor responsible for ensuring such services?
  - Does the institution have a sufficient number of trained student service personnel to ensure provision of appropriate support for distance learning students in such areas as admissions and counseling?
2. Has the institution made appropriate and necessary adjustments to ensure adequate academic support services for students involved in distance learning programs?
  - Does the institution have a sufficient number of trained academic support personnel to ensure provision of academic assistance needed by distance education students?
  - How does the institution identify distance education students who need academic assistance and how does it intervene to provide that assistance?
3. Does the institution provide distance education students with material indicating academic and student support services which are available to them and how to access the services?
4. Is there data that demonstrates achievement by distance education students of learning outcomes established by the institution?

### ***Summary***

This module has provided an overview of selected salient topics and issues the student services evaluator needs to consider when developing a professional judgment about the institution's case for compliance. The module has not advocated a singular approach to the evaluation of an institution's case but has promoted a set of general questions to guide evaluator's analysis and assist the evaluator in developing a professional judgment. In every situation, the student services evaluator must ensure that professional judgment about an institution's case for compliance within the student services requirements is grounded in an understanding of *The Principles of Accreditation*, an awareness of the institution's mission, clarity about the purpose of the committee review and a thorough examination of the components of an institution's case for compliance.