

WASC Standards for Accreditation

Standard 1:

Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. It has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and relationship to society at large. Through its purposes and educational objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. The institution functions with integrity and autonomy.

Institutional Purposes - Criteria for Review

1.1. The institution's formally approved statements of purpose and operational practices are appropriate for an institution of higher education and clearly define its essential values and character.

1.2. Educational objectives are clearly recognized throughout the institution and are consistent with stated purposes. The institution has developed indicators and evidence to ascertain the level of achievement of its purposes and educational objectives.

1.3. The institution's leadership creates and sustains a leadership system at all levels that is marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility, and accountability.

Integrity - Criteria for Review

1.4. The institution publicly states its commitment to academic freedom for faculty, staff, and students, and acts accordingly. This commitment affirms that those in the academy are free to share their convictions and responsible conclusions with their colleagues and students in their teaching and in their writing.

1.5. Consistent with its purposes and character, the institution demonstrates an appropriate response to the increasing diversity in society through its policies, its educational and co-curricular programs, and its administrative and organizational practices.

1.6. Even when supported by or affiliated with political, corporate, or religious organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose and operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

1.7. The institution truthfully represents its academic goals, programs, and services to students and to the larger public; demonstrates that its academic programs can be completed in a timely fashion; and treats students fairly and equitably through established policies and procedures addressing student conduct, grievances, human subjects in research, and refunds.

1.8. The institution exhibits integrity in its operations as demonstrated by the implementation of appropriate policies, sound business practices, timely and fair responses to complaints and grievances, and regular evaluation of its performance in these areas.

1.9. The institution is committed to honest and open communication with the Accrediting Commission, to undertaking the accreditation review process with seriousness and candor, and to abiding by Commission policies and procedures, including all substantive change policies.

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Standard 2:

Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

The institution achieves its institutional purposes and attains its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning. It demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively and that they support one another in the institution's efforts to attain educational effectiveness.

Teaching and Learning - Criteria for Review

2.1. The institution's educational programs are appropriate in content, standards, and nomenclature for the degree level awarded, regardless of mode of delivery, and are staffed by sufficient numbers of faculty qualified for the type and level of curriculum offered.

2.2. All degrees—undergraduate and graduate—awarded by the institution are clearly defined in terms of entry-level requirements and in terms of levels of student achievement necessary for graduation that represent more than simply an accumulation of courses or credits.

∞ Baccalaureate programs engage students in an integrated course of study of sufficient breadth and depth to prepare them for work, citizenship, and a fulfilling life. These programs also ensure the development of core learning abilities and competencies including, but not limited to, college-level written and oral communication; college-level quantitative skills; information literacy; and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument. In addition, baccalaureate programs actively foster an understanding of diversity; civic responsibility; the ability to work with others; and the capability to engage in lifelong learning. Baccalaureate programs also ensure breadth for all students in the areas of cultural and aesthetic, social and political, as well as scientific and technical knowledge expected of educated persons in this society. Finally, students are required to engage in an in-depth, focused, and sustained program of study as part of their baccalaureate programs.

∞ Graduate programs are consistent with the purpose and character of their institutions; are in keeping with the expectations of their respective disciplines and professions; and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the several levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. Graduate curricula are visibly structured to include active involvement with the literature of the field and ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate high-level professional practice and training experiences. Additionally, admission criteria to graduate programs normally include a baccalaureate degree in an appropriate undergraduate program.

2.3. The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are clearly reflected in its academic programs and policies. These include the organization and content of the institution's curricula; admissions and graduation policies; the organization and delivery of advisement; the use of its library and information resources; and (where applicable) experience in the wider learning environment provided by the campus and/or co-curriculum.

2.4. The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are developed and widely shared among its members (including faculty, students, staff, and where appropriate, external stakeholders). The institution's faculty takes collective responsibility for establishing, reviewing, fostering, and demonstrating the attainment of these expectations.

2.5. The institution's academic programs actively involve students in learning, challenge them to achieve high expectations, and provide them with appropriate and ongoing feedback about their performance and how it can be improved.

2.6. The institution demonstrates that its graduates consistently achieve its stated levels of attainment and ensures that its expectations for student learning are embedded in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work.

2.7. In order to improve program currency and effectiveness, all programs offered by the institution are subject to review, including analyses of the achievement of the program's learning objectives and outcomes. Where appropriate, evidence from external constituencies such as employers and professional societies is included in such reviews.

Scholarship and Creative Activity - Criteria for Review

2.8. The institution actively values and promotes scholarship, curricular and instructional innovation, and creative activity, as well as their dissemination at levels and of the kinds appropriate to the institution's purposes and character.

2.9. The institution recognizes and promotes appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning and service.

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Standard 2:

Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions (continued)

The institution achieves its institutional purposes and attains its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning. It demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively and that they support one another in the institution's efforts to attain educational effectiveness.

Support for Student Learning - Criteria for Review

2.10. Regardless of mode of program delivery, the institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students and assesses their needs, experiences, and levels of satisfaction. This information is used to help shape a learning-centered environment and to actively promote student success.

2.11. Consistent with its purposes, the institution develops and implements co-curricular programs that are integrated with its academic goals and programs, and supports student professional and personal development.

2.12. The institution ensures that all students understand the requirements of their academic programs and receive timely, useful, and regular information and advising about relevant academic requirements.

2.13. Student support services—including financial aid, registration, advising, career counseling, computer labs, and library and information services—are designed to meet the needs of the specific types of students the institution serves and the curricula it offers.

2.14. Institutions that serve transfer students assume an obligation to provide clear and accurate information about transfer requirements, ensure equitable treatment for such students with respect to academic policies, and ensure that such students are not unduly disadvantaged by transfer requirements.

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Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through its investment in human, physical, fiscal, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high quality environment for learning.

Faculty and Staff - Criteria for Review

3.1. The institution employs personnel sufficient in number and professional qualifications to maintain its operations and to support its academic programs, consistent with its institutional and educational objectives.

3.2. The institution demonstrates that it employs a faculty with substantial and continuing commitment to the institution sufficient in number, professional qualifications, and diversity to achieve its educational objectives, to establish and oversee academic policies, and to ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs wherever and however delivered.

3.3. Faculty and staff recruitment, workload, incentive, and evaluation practices are aligned with institutional purposes and educational objectives. Evaluation processes are systematic, include appropriate peer review, and, for instructional faculty and other teaching staff, involve consideration of evidence of teaching effectiveness, including student evaluations of instruction.

3.4. The institution maintains appropriate and sufficiently supported faculty development activities designed to improve teaching and learning consistent with its educational objectives and institutional purpose.

Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources - Criteria for Review

3.5. Fiscal and physical resources are effectively aligned with institutional purposes and educational objectives, and are sufficiently developed to support and maintain the level and kind of educational programs offered both now and for the foreseeable future.

3.6. The institution holds, or provides access to, information resources sufficient in scope, quality, currency, and kind to support its academic offerings and the scholarship of its members. For on-campus students and students enrolled at a distance, physical and information resources, services, and information technology facilities are sufficient in scope and kind to support and maintain the level and kind of education offered. These resources, services and facilities are consistent with the institution's purposes, and are appropriate, sufficient, and sustainable. 3.7. The institution's information technology resources are sufficiently coordinated and supported to fulfill its educational purposes and to provide key academic and administrative functions.

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes - Criteria for Review

3.8. The institution's organizational structures and decision making processes are clear, consistent with its purposes, and sufficient to support effective decision making.

3.9. The institution has an independent governing board or similar authority that, consistent with its legal and fiduciary authority, exercises appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies, and ongoing operations, including hiring and evaluating the chief executive officer.

3.10. The institution has a chief executive whose full-time responsibility is to the institution, together with a cadre of administrators qualified and able to provide effective educational leadership and management at all levels.

3.11. The institution's faculty exercises effective academic leadership and acts consistently to ensure both academic quality and the appropriate maintenance of the institution's educational purposes and character.

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Standard 4:

Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution, and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

Strategic Thinking and Planning - Criteria for Review

4.1. The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies in institutional reflection and planning processes which assess its strategic position; articulate priorities; examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions and resources; and define the future direction of the institution. The institution monitors the effectiveness of the implementation of its plans and revises them as appropriate.

4.2. Planning processes at the institution define and, to the extent possible, align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technological needs with the strategic objectives and priorities of the institution.

4.3. Planning processes are informed by appropriately defined and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and include consideration of evidence of educational effectiveness, including student learning.

Commitment to Learning and Improvement - Criteria for Review

4.4. The institution employs a deliberate set of quality assurance processes at each level of institutional functioning, including new curriculum and program approval processes, periodic program review, ongoing evaluation, and data collection. These processes involve assessments of effectiveness, track results over time, and use the results of these assessments to revise and improve structures and processes, curricula, and pedagogy.

4.5. Institutional research addresses strategic data needs, is disseminated in a timely manner, and is incorporated in institutional review and decision-making processes. Included among the priorities of the institutional research function is the identification of indicators and the collection of appropriate data to support the assessment of student learning consistent with the institution's purposes and educational objectives. Periodic reviews of institutional research and data collection are conducted to develop more effective indicators of performance and to assure the suitability and usefulness of data.

4.6. Leadership at all levels is committed to improvement based on the results of the processes of inquiry, evaluation and assessment used throughout the institution. The faculty take responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and use the results for improvement. Assessments of the campus environment in support of academic and co-curricular objectives are also undertaken and used, and are incorporated into institutional planning.

4.7. The institution, with significant faculty involvement, engages in ongoing inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning, as well as into the conditions and practices that promote the kinds and levels of learning intended by the institution. The outcomes of such inquiries are applied to the design of curricula, the design and practice of pedagogy, and to the improvement of evaluation means and methodology.

4.8. Appropriate stakeholders, including alumni, employers, practitioners, and others defined by the institution, are involved in the assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs.