



Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities expects each institution and program to adopt an assessment plan responsive to its mission and its needs. In so doing, the Commission urges the necessity of a continuing process of academic planning, the carrying out of those plans, the assessment of the outcomes, and the influencing of the planning process by the assessment activities.

As noted in Standard Two, implicit in the mission statement of every institution of higher education is the education of students. Consequently, each institution has an obligation to plan carefully its courses of instruction to respond to student needs, to evaluate the effectiveness of that educational program in terms of the change it brings about in students, and to make improvements in the program dictated by the evaluative process. Assessment of educational quality has always been at the heart of the accreditation process. In earlier times, this assessment tended to focus more upon process measures and structural features; hence, there was considerable emphasis placed upon resources available to enhance students' educational experiences such as the range and variety of graduate degrees held by members of the faculty, the number of books in the library, the quality of specialized laboratory equipment, and the like. More recently, while still stressing the need to assess the quantity and quality of the whole educational experience, the communities of interest served by the accreditation enterprise have come to appreciate the validity and usefulness of using output evaluations and assessment as well as input measures.

Nearly every institution accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities engages in some type of outcomes assessment. Some are more formalized than others; some more quantified; some less so; some well-developed and long-utilized, and some of more recent origin and implementation. The intent of Commission policy is to stress outcomes assessment as an essential part of the ongoing institutional self-study and accreditation processes, to underline the necessity for each institution to

formulate a plan which provides for a series of outcomes measures that are internally consistent and in accord with its mission and structure, and, finally, to provide some examples of a variety of successful plans for assessing educational outcomes.

Central to the outcomes analyses or assessments are judgments about the effects of the educational program upon students. These judgments can be made in a variety of ways and can be based upon a variety of data sources. The more data sources that contribute to the overall judgment, the more reliable that judgment would seem to be. There follows a list of several outcomes measures which, when used in appropriate combinations and informed by the institutional mission, could yield an efficacious program of outcomes assessment. This list is intended to be illustrative and exemplary as opposed to prescriptive and exhaustive.

Student Information.

Mid-Program Assessments.

End of Program Assessment.

Program Review and Specialized Accreditation.

Alumni Satisfaction and Loyalty.

Dropouts/Non-completers.

Employment and/or Employer Satisfaction Measures.

Other institutions have found qualitative comments of frequent employers to be particularly helpful in assessing educational outcomes. Do the employers regularly recruit program graduates? Why or why not? How well do program graduates perform in comparison with graduates from other similar programs? Are there areas of the curriculum in which program graduates are particularly well prepared? Which areas? Why is preparation judged to be particularly good? Where are the weaknesses? Why? What is being done to provide remedial activity?