

Common Assessment Expectations of Regionally Accredited Colleges and Universities

As I mentioned in my last message about indicators of a learner-focus, I recently attended a workshop on the new criteria for accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (HLC) and I thought that I would share several items from that meeting with you.

The majority of the presentation by the HLC speaker, Karen Solomon, was spent discussing the implications of the new criteria for the assessment of student learning. She noted that in contrast to the former criteria for accreditation, the HLC's new criteria have assessment issues woven throughout all of the criteria. She also noted that discussions about the Reauthorization of Higher Education Act have significantly increased accountability expectations and that all of the regional accrediting bodies were increasing their expectations in regard to the assessment of student learning by colleges and universities.

In 2003, The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions adopted a set of good practices for student learning. Within these good practices, they outline what an accrediting commission should reasonably expect of an institution. Those expectations are as follows:

1. The centrality of student learning in its mission.
2. Documentation of student learning as accomplished by:
 - a. setting clear learning goals/objectives/outcomes (content and level);
 - b. collecting evidence of achievement of goals/objectives/outcomes using appropriate assessment methods;
 - c. applying collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of the evidence; and
 - d. using this evidence to improve its programs.
3. Evidence of the institution's impact on student learning is compiled from multiple sources (curricular and co-curricular).
4. Involvement of all institutional stakeholders in the collection, interpretation, and use of student learning evidence. These responsibilities are not viewed as solely belonging to a single office or position.
5. The capacity of the institution to foster educational improvement is built through broad participation.