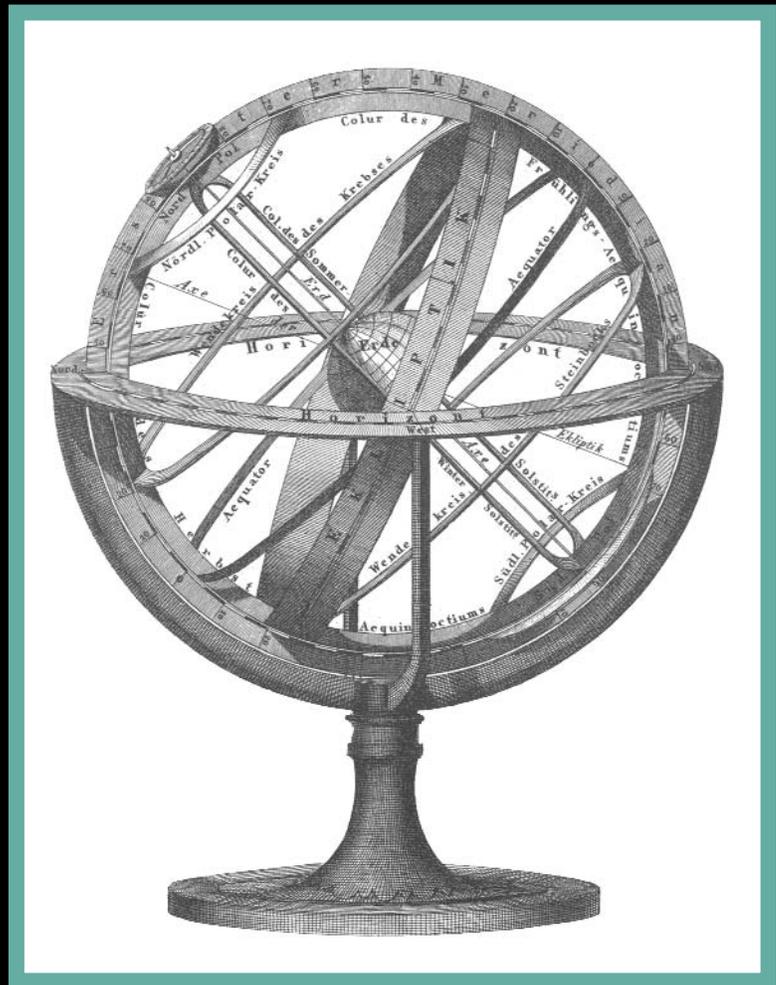


# RESOURCE MANUAL FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION: FOUNDATIONS FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*  
**Commission on Colleges**

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RESOURCE MANUAL FOR THE  
PRINCIPLES OF  
ACCREDITATION:  
FOUNDATIONS FOR  
QUALITY  
ENHANCEMENT



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*

***Commission on Colleges***

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# PREAMBLE

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The manner in which a college or university makes its case for compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* is an institutional decision, and the process employed by a peer review committee to reach its decision on compliance issues is likewise determined by the professional judgment of that committee within the context of the institution’s specific circumstances and mission.

The *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation* is designed to provide guidance to institutions as they seek to determine the extent of their compliance with Commission requirements and standards. The manual is intended to stimulate thinking when assessing compliance with the Core Requirements (CR) and Comprehensive Standards (CS) without prescribing a specific institutional practice or approach or providing a mandatory “checklist” to be followed. The comments are included only to provide some background for forming professional judgment regarding compliance. Many more factors could be taken into consideration, depending on the institutional context and the particularities of the individual situation. Neither is the manual intended to require a single institutional approach to the evaluation and documentation of compliance with a standard: they are not prescriptive. While acknowledging the diverse nature of institutional missions and the range of educational programs represented within the membership of the Commission, this manual provides a rationale and notes, related questions, and sample documentation that an institution might consider as it assesses its compliance with those accreditation requirements.

*In all cases, the institution should think about the most appropriate ways for demonstrating compliance in light of its mission and then focus on presenting its case.*

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# ORGANIZATION OF THE MANUAL

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The manual examines all four Sections of the *Principles of Accreditation*: Section 1—Principles and Philosophy; Section 2—Core Requirements; Section 3—Comprehensive Standards; and Section 4—Federal Requirements. An institution is not required to submit documentation of compliance with the elements in Section 1; therefore, the format is different than that of the other three sections. For each requirement/standard that requires an institution to submit documentation of compliance in Sections 2, 3, and 4, the manual addresses the following:

## ***Rationale and Notes***

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A further explanation of the standard or requirement along with reasons for its inclusion in the *Principles*. In some instances, there may be a note regarding a recent interpretation by the Executive Council of the Commission, or a related Commission policy, or an expanded explanation of a historical interpretation.

## ***Relevant Questions for Consideration***

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A series of questions that may help an institution examine its processes and practices.

## ***Sample Documentation***

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Documents or patterns of evidence that might be examined by the institution and provided as part of the documentation of the extent of its compliance with the requirement or standard.

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## SECTION 1

# PRINCIPLES AND PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION

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### 1.1 Institutional Integrity

Institutional integrity serves as the foundation of the relationship between the Commission on Colleges and its member and candidate institutions. This fundamental philosophy is reflected in the *Principles of Accreditation* as follows:

Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member institutions. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information to the public, or failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission will be seen as the lack of a full commitment to integrity and may result in the loss of membership in the Commission on Colleges. (p. 5)

As a condition of candidacy or membership in the Commission on Colleges, the institution agrees to document its compliance with the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*; to comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies; and to make complete, accurate and honest disclosure to the Commission.

The Commission's policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership" states that the Commission on Colleges requires a member institution to comply with the Core Requirements and the Comprehensive Standards and Commission policies and procedures, and to provide information as requested by the Commission in order to maintain membership and accreditation. The policy also states:

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Failure to respond appropriately to Commission decisions and requests or to make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, including the denial or revocation of candidacy or accreditation. (p. 1)

In order to comply with these requirements for integrity and accuracy in reporting in its relationships with the Commission, the president must review and ensure the accuracy and integrity of materials submitted by the institution, such as the Compliance Certification and Quality Enhancement Plan. In addition, an institution shall meet the following expectations:

1. Ensure that all documents submitted to the Commission are candid and provide all pertinent information, whether complimentary or otherwise. With due regard for the rights of individual privacy, every institution applying for candidacy, extension of candidacy, accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation, as well as every candidate and accredited institution, provide the Commission with access to all parts of its operations, and with complete and accurate information about the institution's affairs, including reports of other accrediting, licensing, and auditing agencies.
2. Respond in a timely manner to requests by the Commission for submission of dues, fees, reports, or other information.
3. Ensure that other information submitted to the Commission (such as that provided in the annual institutional profile, institutional responses to visiting committee reports, and monitoring reports) is complete, accurate, and current.
4. Cooperate with the Commission in preparation for visits, receive visiting committees in a spirit of collegiality, and comply with the Commission's requests for acceptable reports and self-analyses.
5. Report substantive changes, including the initiation of new programs or sites outside the region, or new sites within the region in accordance with the Commission policy on substantive change.
6. Report accurately to the public its status and relationship with the Commission.
7. Provide counsel and advice to the Commission and agree to have its faculty and administrators serve, within reason, on visiting teams and on Commission committees.
8. Provide the Commission or its representatives with information requested and maintain an openness and cooperation during evaluations, enabling evaluators to perform their duties with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

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The Commission accredits institutions, not individuals. Therefore, any individual who reports to the Commission on behalf of an institution—either by virtue of his or her office or as delegated by the chief executive officer of the institution—obligates the institution in all matters regarding institutional integrity.

## 1.2 Quality Enhancement

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission’s philosophy of accreditation as reflected in the *Principles of Accreditation* as follows:

The Commission on Colleges expects an institution to dedicate itself to enhancing the quality of its programs and services within the context of its mission, resources, and capabilities, and to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occurs.

The concept of quality enhancement presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution’s educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major assets. (p. 5)

## 1.3 Institutional Compliance with Commission Policy

### 1.3.1 Substantive Change (pp. 10-11)

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. The *Principles of Accreditation* states:

The Commission on Colleges accredits the entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located and however they are delivered. Accreditation, specific to an institution, is based on conditions existing at the time of the most recent evaluation and is not transferable. When an accredited institution significantly modifies or expands its scope, or changes the nature of its affiliation or its ownership, a substantive change review is required.

A member institution is responsible for following the substantive change policy by informing the Commission of changes in accord with the Commission’s procedures and, when required, seeking approval prior to the initiation of the change. If an institution fails to follow the procedures, its accreditation may be placed in jeopardy. (See Commission policy, “Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions,” outlin-

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ing the types of substantive changes, approval and notification requirements, and reporting timelines.)

### 1.3.2 Commission Policies and Procedures (pp. 7-8)

The *Principles of Accreditation* states:

The Commission’s philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education on any ground other than an institution’s failure to meet the standards of the Commission in the professional judgment of peer reviewers, or failure to comply with the policies and procedures of the Commission. (See the Commission’s Web site for policies: [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org))

### 1.3.3 Representation of Institutional Status (p. 11)

The *Principles of Accreditation* contains two references to an institution’s representation of status. In Section 1.3.3, the *Principles* requires an institution to report accurately to the public its status with the Commission and provides statements for use by a member institution and a candidate institution. The appropriate statement is to be reported in “all official publications” of the institution.

Federal Requirement 4.7 requires an institution to publish the name, address, and phone number of its primary accreditor. It does not have to be recorded as part of the institution’s representation of status statement above, but it does have to be recorded somewhere. When preparing this statement, the institution should make it clear that the name, address, and phone number of the primary accreditor are posted exclusively for public access to information about the institution’s accreditation status and not about any of the policies, procedures, or requirements specific to the institution.

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## SECTION 2

# CORE REQUIREMENTS

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### **2.1 The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

To be eligible for accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, an institution must demonstrate that it is legally authorized to grant undergraduate and/or graduate degrees within appropriate geographical boundaries. This applies to all programs wherever they are offered. Because education in the United States largely operates under the jurisdiction of states, typically such authorization is granted through state legislation, sometimes by language contained in state constitutions, more often in other supplemental laws, and—more recently—through actions of state education coordinating boards.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What agencies have authorized the institution to grant degrees?
- When was the authorization first or most recently approved?
- Are there any conditional approvals? If so, by whom and for what reasons?
- If the institution offers degrees in more than one state, what is the evidence of multiple authorizations?
- If the institution offers degrees internationally, what is the evidence of authorization by each individual country?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Official documentation or enabling legislation authorizing the institution to grant degrees
- Board of control bylaws containing references to degree-granting authority and outlining any conditions or restrictions on such authority

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**2.2 The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Neither the presiding officer of the board nor the majority of other voting members of the board have contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.**

**A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board in which neither the presiding officer nor a majority of the other members are civilian employees of the military or active/retired military. The board has broad and significant influence upon the institutions programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Neither the presiding officer of the board nor the majority of other voting board members have contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.**

Rationale and Notes:

Ultimate responsibility for the governance of the institution rests with an independent, qualified, empowered governing board. This board is a collective entity responsible for determining the mission of the institution, ensuring that the institution's leadership is guided by that mission, and holding in trust the well-being of the institution. The board is adequately informed about the operations of the institution to carry out its fiduciary responsibility. However, the board's responsibility is for policy and fiscal viability, not daily operations, which is entrusted to administrative and faculty leadership. Members of the governing board act with authority only as a collective entity.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How are board members and the presiding officer elected or appointed?
- How do the process and board structure ensure compliance?
- What evidence is there that the board controls the institution?
- What evidence is there that board members as a corporate body focus on policy issues, CEO performance review, overall mission, and financial viability?
- How often do the board members meet and is their agenda appropriate for their responsibilities?

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Sample Documentation:

- Bylaws and charter
- Minutes of board meetings
- List of board members, their occupations, their professional affiliations, and terms of office
- Organizational chart

**2.3 The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board.**

Rationale and Notes:

To keep administration in higher education distinct from policy making, institutions typically appoint chief executive officers, generally called presidents or chancellors, and charge them with leadership responsibilities on behalf of the institution. Even though the board of control normally has the power to employ and dismiss the chief executive officer, that individual has appropriate authority—and responsibility—to administer and execute the policies related to broad institutional issues developed by the board. The chief executive officer and those senior administrators reporting to that individual are responsible for implementing the board’s policies, evaluating them periodically, and reporting results to the board for possible revision or refinement.

**Note:** In December 2004 the Commission adopted an interpretation to this requirement applying to circumstances when an institution is part of a system and its president is also the chief executive officer of the system. Refer to COC policy, “Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternative Approach,” required for compliance (available at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)).

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the name and title of the institution’s chief executive officer?
- How is the chief executive officer selected and appointed?
- How does the chief executive officer’s job description define his or her relationship to the governing board?
- Who is the presiding officer of the institution’s governing board?
- If the president is also the chief operating officer of the system, how does the institution ensure that there is no conflict of interest?

Sample Documentation:

- Copy of board and/or institution’s bylaws
- Job description for the chief executive officer
- Copy of the administrative or institutional policy manual
- If the president is also the chief operating officer of the system, documentation required as part of the Commission policy described above

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**2.4 The institution has a clearly defined and published mission statement specific to the institution and appropriate to an institution of higher education, addressing teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.**

Rationale and Notes:

A clearly defined and comprehensive mission statement is absolutely fundamental to the structure of an institution's effectiveness review. An effective mission statement conveys the essence of institutional identity and reflects a clear understanding of the institution by the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff. It is the foundation upon which the institution examines itself, allocates its resources, and plans its future. Furthermore, it guides the public's perception of the nature of the institution. While the institutional mission statement may be brief, it nevertheless describes completely and clearly what the institution does. It conveys a sense of the institution's uniqueness and identifies the qualities, characteristics, and values that define the institution's place, role, and distinctiveness within the diverse higher education community. Institutional integrity demands congruence between the mission statement and the institution's governance as well as consistency in representation of the statement itself.

The expectation of this requirement is that the mission of the institution is appropriate to higher education and that the focus is on teaching and learning. While related statements regarding institutional philosophy or vision may accompany the mission statement, it is important that the institution develop educational goals and objectives that are clearly recognized throughout the institution and are consistent with the mission. Ascertaining the level of achievement of its mission and its educational goals and objectives will be the primary focus of an institution's assessment of effectiveness.

The Commission recognizes that some institutions of higher education may not include research and public service explicitly in their primary mission or that they may define research and public service in different ways. To the extent that the institution considers research and public service part of its mission, it should address those mission components appropriately in the statement itself and define them within the institutional context.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the mission of the institution and is it clearly defined?
- How is it published and disseminated?
- How is the mission statement appropriate to an institution of higher education?
- How does the mission address teaching and learning and, if appropriate, research and public service?
- How does the mission statement describe the distinctiveness of the institution and its values?

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### Sample Documentation:

- A copy of the current mission statement
- Print and electronic examples of publications in which the mission statement is published

## **2.5 The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.**

### Rationale and Notes:

Institutional effectiveness is the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring performance against mission in all aspects of an institution. The purpose of this Core Requirement is to assure that the institution has an appropriate approach to effectiveness that supports its mission. A commitment to continuous improvement is at the heart of an ongoing planning and evaluation process. It is a continuous, cyclical process that is participative, flexible, relevant, and responsive. The approach to institutional effectiveness includes all programs, services, and constituencies and is strongly linked to the decision-making process at all levels, including the institution's budgeting process.

While the requirement does not imply that all elements of the system must be undertaken simultaneously or even annually, the various activities of the institution's planning and evaluation system are scheduled at periodic intervals that make sense for the institution and its mission. The results of diverse assessment efforts can be integrated to provide a sound basis for plans aimed at institutional improvement.

Because the process used for institutional effectiveness permeates *all* facets of the institution, it is appropriate that a review of this Core Requirement includes the institution's mission and effectiveness, the commitment of leadership to integrate planning and continuous improvement, and its approach to documenting the evidence of its process.

**Note:** Even though the concept of institutional effectiveness may not be explicitly referenced in all of the comprehensive standards, the accreditation process assumes that all programs and services wherever offered within the context of the institution's activity are reviewed as part of the institutional effectiveness process.

**Note:** CR 2.5, CS 3.3.1, and CS 3.4.1 all relate directly to institutional effectiveness but each addresses a different aspect. CR 2.5 requires that an institution have an effective *process* for producing improvement and accomplishing its mission. CS 3.3.1 requires that an institution identify outcomes (resulting from the process required in CR 2.5), evaluate *achievement of those outcomes*, and demonstrate improvement based on the results of that evaluation. This applies to all educational programs and all administrative and support services. CS 3.4.1 requires that each educational program offered for academic credit establish and evaluate *student learning outcomes*.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the institution's processes for systematic, ongoing, integrated, research-based reviews that result in continuous improvement?
- How does the institution demonstrate a sustained, documented history of planning evaluation cycles, including the use of results for improvement, to accomplish the institution's mission?
- Is there appropriate institutional research and budgetary support for assessment programs throughout the institution?
- What is the evidence that data from various sources concerning the effectiveness of programs and services are being used to make decisions for improvement?
- How is the institutional effectiveness process related to the budget?
- Are appropriate internal and external constituents and stakeholders involved in the planning and assessment process?

Sample Documentation:

- Evidence of linkage of institutional effectiveness to institutional mission
- Institutional plans and budgets that demonstrate the linkage of assessment findings to planning at all levels
- Minutes of appropriate unit, committee, task force meetings related to the coordination of institutional effectiveness and evidence of broad-based involvement of faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders in the institutional effectiveness process
- Documentation that relates to institutional effectiveness, such as budget preparation instructions, minutes of budget presentation meetings, annual reports, annual assessment updates, institutional effectiveness reports
- Samples of specific actions taken to improve the institutional effectiveness process and/or results from that process

**2.6 The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs.**

Rationale and Notes:

The Commission on Colleges accredits degree-granting institutions in the southern region of the United States. In order to be evaluated for accreditation by the Commission, an institution needs to be a functioning organization with students enrolled in degree programs.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How long has the institution been in operation?
- How many students are currently enrolled in degree programs?

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Sample Documentation:

- List of degrees offered along with current enrollment numbers

**2.7.1 The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. The institution provides a written justification and rationale for program equivalency.**

Rationale and Notes:

The requirement reflects the generally accepted means of determining academic credit required for degrees in higher education. The requirement uses as its basis the semester credit hour or its equivalency. In instances where an institution relies on other means of determining “academic credit” other than semester hours, it must demonstrate that its approach adheres to generally accepted practices described by this Core Requirement.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution identify the minimum number of credit hours required for degrees at each level?
- What are the institution’s policies and procedures related to the establishment of new programs and do they include reference to minimum length for programs at each level?
- If an academic unit other than semester hours is used, what is the unit equivalency to semester hours and how does the institution make this determination?

Sample Documentation:

- Catalogs describing approved degree program requirements at all levels (associate, baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, graduate, and professional) that include the credit hours required for each degree
- Evidence of internal and external program reviews which include a review of credit hours required for each degree program
- A description of any unit that is the equivalent of a semester hour and how it determines program length

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**2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated purpose and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.**

Rationale and Notes:

Programs offered by the institution are directly connected to its mission and to fields of study appropriate to higher education. In order to guide students through the continuous process of learning, the content of the program demands increasing levels of knowledge integration. Coherence is a critical component of a program and should demonstrate an appropriate sequencing of courses, not a mere bundling of credits, so that student learning is progressively more advanced in terms of assignments and scholarship required and demonstrates progressive advancement in a field of study that allows students to integrate knowledge and grow in critical skills.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists that the institution offers degree programs consistent with its stated mission?
- How does the institution ensure that each of its degree programs demonstrates coherence in sequencing, increasing complexity, and linkages between and among program components?
- How does the institution demonstrate that its programs are appropriate to higher education?

Sample Documentation:

- College or university catalogs listing courses required in each program offered and providing course descriptions
- Results of program reviews including attention to the coherence of programs and compatibility with the mission of the institution
- Comparative data with similar peer institutions
- Rationale for programs and their suitability for higher education
- State mandates providing curriculum guidelines

**2.7.3 The institution requires in each undergraduate degree program the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and**

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**natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The institution provides a written justification and rationale for course equivalency.**

Rationale and Notes:

This Core Requirement establishes five key principles regarding general education courses:

- General education courses are college-level
- General education courses present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry
- General education is based on a coherent rationale
- Each course or experience is evaluated within the institution's overall rationale for general education
- The general education component constitutes a minimum number of semester hours

It is essential to understand the general education component of the degree program within the context of the institution's mission and within the expectations of a college-level institution. Through general education, students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge: humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences and mathematics. Courses in these areas introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for each student. It is important that institutions rely on their curricular reviews to determine the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education offerings. (See also the discussion for CS 3.4.10.)

**Note:** The Commission's standing interpretation is that a course in basic composition or in oral communication may not be used as the sole designated course in humanities/fine arts.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence is found of an institutional rationale for general education that serves as the basis for including selected courses?
- How does the institution ensure that the student's breadth of knowledge acquired through the general education component of the degree program is sufficient and appropriate to its mission?
- By what measures does the institution ensure that general education represents a substantial component of the undergraduate degree program?
- What process is used to ensure that general education courses address the goals of the general education component?
- What criteria does the institution use to assure that the required skill level meets collegiate standards?
- Do all degree programs include at least one course from the three required areas of study?

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Sample Documentation:

- Description of and rationale for general education
- Documentation of the institution's procedure for selecting courses that meet general education requirements
- Catalogs and other program publications that consistently describe the general education requirements
- Documentation that general education courses incorporate student learning outcomes associated with general education
- Documentation on exceptions and policies and procedures for the transfer of general education courses

**2.7.4 The institution provides instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. If the institution makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia, or uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In all cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. (See Commission policy, “Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alternative Approach,” available at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).)**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard expects an institution to offer instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program offered at each level at which it awards degrees. When this is not the case and part of the instruction is provided by another accredited institution, then the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission and the institution must demonstrate that it controls the quality of its programs. The rationale for each approach follows:

- 1. The institution provides instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees.** The expectation is that the institution provides instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards a degree or degrees in order to control and ensure the quality of the program, to maintain the integrity of each level of degree offered, and to carry out its mission.
- 2. If the institution makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia, or uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In all cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. In accord with Commission policy, “Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alterna-**

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tive Approach,” an institution may choose to offer a degree program at a level at which it does not provide instruction for all coursework for at least one degree program. For example, the institution may award a baccalaureate degree in one or more programs, but it does not offer all the coursework for any degree program for which it awards the baccalaureate degree. Instead, it may choose to enter into a consortium or contractual arrangement or use another alternative approach by which it accepts from another source some coursework required for the degree or degrees.

In order to gain approval from the Commission for such arrangements, the institution describes the arrangement and demonstrates that although it does not offer all coursework for the program or programs at a particular degree level, it assumes responsibility for and maintains control of all aspects of the degree program or programs. It is important that the institution assess the competencies of students relative to the coursework accepted from another source and ensure that the learning outcomes are consistent with expected outcomes had the institution offered the coursework. The responsibility for the integrity of programs or coursework accepted through an alternative means rests with the institution awarding the degree or degrees. (See Commission policy described above for specific directions for addressing compliance.)

In all cases, if the institution provides instruction for all course work or if it has alternative arrangements for offering a degree program, it is the responsibility of the institution to control the quality of that program.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Does the institution provide instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program offered at each level at which it awards degrees?
- If yes, what evidence exists that it provides all instruction?
- If no, what alternative arrangement or consortium or contract does the institution have for provision of coursework which it does not offer? How does the institution maintain responsibility and control of the coursework (content and learning outcomes) accepted through an alternative means or through a consortium or contract? What evidence is provided that such arrangements are evaluated regularly? Has the Commission on Colleges approved the consortium or contract, if necessary?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Documentation of instruction for all coursework for at least one degree program offered at each level at which the institution offers degrees
- Description of the alternative means or consortium or contract used to provide coursework for degree programs at any level at which the institution does not offer all coursework for at least one degree program
- Copies of any consortium agreement or contract for such arrangements
- Explanation and evidence of how the institution maintains responsibility for and

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control over the quality of courses accepted through the Commission’s policy “Documenting an Alternative Approach.” Such evidence might include committee minutes, reports, and assessment instruments demonstrating that the institution has developed, implemented, and evaluated the means by which it ensures appropriate control over all aspects of the programs and services provided through such arrangements or agreements or contracts.

**2.8 The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution. The institution has adequate faculty resources to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs. In addition, upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 for faculty qualifications.**

Rationale and Notes:

Adequacy of faculty resources is necessary to ensure the quality and the integrity of an institution’s academic programs. Moreover, the mission of the institution will govern the type of faculty employed, including the number of full-time faculty members. The achievement of the institution’s mission with respect to teaching, research, and/or service will require a critical mass of permanent, full-time, qualified faculty to provide direction and oversight of academic programs. The number of such faculty will need to be sufficient to fulfill basic faculty functions of curriculum design, development, and evaluation; teaching; identification and assessment of appropriate student learning outcomes; student advising; research and creative activity; and institutional and professional service. The work of the core faculty may be supplemented and enhanced by judicious assignment of part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants whose special qualifications broaden and enrich the curriculum and increase learning opportunities for students.

**Note:** This requirement addresses the adequacy of faculty personnel, not the adequacy of academic support services and resources.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the institution’s definitions of terms such as full-time faculty, regular/permanent faculty, student-faculty ratio?
- How does the mission of the institution determine the number and type of faculty employed?
- How does the institution determine the number of full-time faculty needed to achieve its mission?
- What is the responsibility of the full-time faculty and do they constitute a sufficient resource for carrying out basic faculty functions? What are the ways in which

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members of the institution other than full-time faculty carry out some of these functions?

- What are the institution's policies on employment of part-time or adjunct faculty?

Sample Documentation:

- Definitions of terms such as full-time faculty, regular/permanent faculty, student-faculty ratio
- Data such as number of faculty; student-faculty ratios; faculty loads; proportion of courses taught by full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants; comparisons of peer institutions; etc.
- A narrative describing the relation of the type and number of faculty to the mission of the institution
- Policies describing the role of full-time faculty (and others) in the carrying out of the basic functions of the faculty as described in the rationale
- Policies governing the employment of part-time faculty and graduate assistants

**2.9 The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections as well as to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. These collections and resources are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs.**

Rationale and Notes:

The purpose of this Core Requirement is to ensure that an institution's students and faculty have access to appropriate collections and other learning resources that support all educational programs wherever they are offered and at the appropriate degree level. The levels and types of degrees offered by an institution determine the nature and extent of resources needed to support the full range of its academic programs. In order to support adequately the institution's curriculum and mission, an institution may arrange for its students and faculty to have convenient access to the resources of another institution, or to resources that are jointly accessed by a consortium of institutions.

**Note:** There is a distinction between CR 2.9 and CS 3.8.1. CR 2.9 requires *adequate and sufficient library collections and other learning/information resources* and access to those collections; CS 3.8.1 requires *appropriate facilities, services, and learning/information resources* to support the institution's mission.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the library resources and are they appropriate to support the educational programs offered?

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- How does the institution provide access to library/learning resources not owned by the institution?
  - How does the institution manage resource relationships outside its direct control while also ensuring relevance to its academic program?
  - What access to collections and services is provided for off-campus sites and distance learning courses?
  - How does the institution determine adequacy and relevancy of library/learning resources to support all its educational, research, and service needs?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and procedures governing collections and access to other library/learning resources
- Copies of contracts and agreements with other libraries/learning resources outlining access and how it is monitored
- Description and analysis of the appropriateness of other institutions' collections and services for which access contracts are maintained; documentation of relevance and adequacy
- Evidence that the institution's library and learning resources support all its educational programs and all its research and public service programs

**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.**

Rationale and Notes:

Appropriate student support programs and services enhance the educational development of students at all levels. The expectation of this requirement is that institutions recognize this important component of student learning and student development and that, in the context of their mission, provide a comprehensive and appropriate range of support services and programs at all locations.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the student support programs and services provided by the institution that serve all levels of students?
- How do the student support programs and services effectively promote the mission of the institution for all types of students?
- How do student support programs and services promote student learning and enhance their development?
- How are the student support programs and services assessed for their effectiveness and adequacy? What is evidence that the programs are effective?

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Sample Documentation:

- Descriptions of the various student support programs and services
- Narrative relating the student support services and programs to the mission of the institution
- Assessment procedures for student support services and programs
- Assessment evidence that the student support services and programs effectively meet the needs of students of all types and promote student learning and development

**2.11 The institution has a sound financial base, demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.**

**The member institution provides the following financial statements: (a) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a system wide or statewide audit) and written institutional management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant and/or an appropriate governmental auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (b) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year; and (c) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board.**

**Audit requirements for applicant institutions may be found in the Commission policy “Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions.”**

Rationale and Notes:

Although missions vary among institutions of higher education, a sound financial base and a pattern of financial stability, along with the effective use of its financial resources, provide the foundation for the ongoing accomplishment of an institution’s mission regardless of changing economic conditions. Adequate resources allow for deliberate consideration of the effective use of resources to fulfill that mission.

Adequate physical resources are essential to the educational environment and include well-maintained buildings and grounds that are safe and appropriate for the scope of the institution’s programs and services.

It is reasonable that the general public, governmental entities, and current and prospective students expect sufficient financial and physical resources necessary to fulfill the institution’s mission as an ongoing concern.

**Note:** The financial statements noted in CR 2.11 are necessary, as a minimum, to provide documentation of financial resources and stability.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution demonstrate a pattern of financial stability?
- How does the institution fund tuition discounts?
- How does the institution demonstrate that the physical resources of the institution are adequate in quality, quantity, and condition to meet the scope and purpose of programs and services?
- Are audited financial statements, or standard review reports, prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and all FASB or GASB standards?
- How is the institution's budget approved?
- How do current assets adequately meet current liabilities?

Required Documentation:

- Audited financial statements, including footnotes, for the most recently ended fiscal year prior to the due date of an institution's compliance certification, or, a Standard Review Report, with individual institutional financial information for the most recently ended fiscal year end prior to the due date of an institution's Compliance Certification
- A written management letter specific to the institution for the most recently ended fiscal year prior to the due date of an institution's compliance
- Statement of Unrestricted Net Assets exclusive of plant and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year
- The current annual budget or evidence of budget planning
- Documentation of board approval of the budget

Sample Documentation:

- Rating agency reviews with special attention to any upgrades or downgrades in bond ratings (if applicable)
- Approved, amended and actual budget totals for the past 3 years
- Copies of contribution agreements that affect the financial stability of the institution
- Financial history and narrative regarding recently completed, present, or planned capital campaigns
- Evidence of financial stability
- Trend reports that represent financial stability such as enrollment, endowment return, state appropriations, etc.
- Facilities master plan
- Facilities inventory plan
- Surveys from faculty, staff, and students addressing adequacy of the institution's physical facilities

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## 2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates that the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.

### Rationale and Notes:

The *Principles of Accreditation* attests to the commitment of the Commission on Colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a component of the accreditation process that reflects and affirms both of these commitments. Developing a QEP as part of the reaffirmation process is an opportunity and an impetus for an institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning.

The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) directly related to enhancing student learning. Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues but, in all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies need to be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning. In order to ensure that the QEP is implemented, the institution integrates it into its ongoing planning and evaluation process.

**Note:** The QEP is a course of action that is specific to an institution and its mission. It is intended to be customized and designed to meet the needs of the particular institution. It is an opportunity for an institution to be creative in an area related to compliance with the *Principles*. Therefore, although an institution may want to study QEPs completed by other institutions, an institution's QEP should reflect the needs of the institution and be customized to accomplish its goals.

At the time of the on-site review, the Commission expects an institution to have in place all components that are characteristic to any workable plan: (1) a focused topic (directly related to student learning), (2) clear goals, (3) adequate resources in place to implement the plan, (4) evaluation strategies for determining the achievement of goals, and (5) evidence of community development and support of the plan.

### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Has the institution identified and provided a clear and concise description of a significant issue(s) directly related to student learning?
- What are the goals of the QEP and how do they relate to student learning?
- What are the intended benefits of the QEP to the institution and to the student?
- What resources (personnel, financial, physical, academic, etc.) are necessary for the successful implementation of the QEP?
- How will the progress of the QEP be monitored? (timelines, administration and oversight of its implementation by qualified individuals, etc.)
- 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?

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- How has the QEP been integrated into the institution's ongoing planning and evaluation processes?
  - How has the institution demonstrated that a cross section of its community has been involved in the development of the QEP?

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## SECTION 3

# COMPREHENSIVE STANDARDS

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### **3.1.1 The institution has a clear and comprehensive mission statement that guides it; is approved by the governing board; and is communicated to the institution’s constituencies.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

The mission statement is comprehensive and addresses all aspects of institutional function and actively guides the institution. It is important that the mission statement be formally adopted, published, implemented, and made available to all the constituencies of the institution and to the general public. Because the statement describes what the institution does, it is the foundation for planning and assessment processes. These processes validate that the institution does what it claims and evaluates how well it fulfills its mission statement. The mission statement thus provides the basis and context for evaluating institutional effectiveness. The standard assumes a uniform publication of the mission statement.

The institution’s governing board formally approves and periodically reviews the institution’s mission statement. The board in its review reaffirms the mission statement whether or not changes are made—thereby maintaining a cognizance of previously agreed-upon scope of institutional activities, and ensures that policies, procedures, and activities remain compatible with and included in the mission statement. Likewise, the mission statement guides the board, the administration, and the faculty in its deliberations and policy-making decisions in order to encourage coherence, consistency, and congruence in institutional direction.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution show that its mission statement clearly communicates the essence of the institution, its distinctiveness or unique characteristics, its major educational components, and its primary constituents?
- In what ways does the mission statement guide the directions, decisions, activities, policies, and procedures of the institution? What evidence exists of a clear linkage between the mission statement and all major aspects of institutional function?

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- What evidence shows that the mission statement has been approved formally and reviewed periodically by the institution’s governing board?
  - How and when does the institution communicate its mission statement in a consistent manner to its constituencies?
  - How does the mission statement guide decisions of the institution?

Sample Documentation:

- Mission statement and examples of how it is disseminated
- Governing board minutes documenting approval and periodic review of the mission statement and resulting changes made to the statement, when appropriate
- Examples of how the mission statement guides the activities and decisions of the institution

**3.2.1 The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and evaluation of the chief executive officer.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard assumes that the governing board is that group which holds the institution and its well being in trust. This group also has responsibility for selecting and evaluating the chief executive officer. Few trustee activities are as consequential to the institution’s future and well being as finding and selecting the best possible chief executive officer, and few activities provide a better opportunity for assessing the institution’s present condition and future needs

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How is the chief executive officer selected?
- What are the board’s criteria for determining an effective presidential performance?
- How is the president evaluated?

Sample Documentation:

- Written policies for presidential evaluation
- Records of the most recent presidential search
- Minutes documenting board review of the president
- Written reports on presidential reviews
- Position description for the president

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**3.2.2 The legal authority and operating control of the institution are clearly defined for the following areas within the institution’s governance structure:**

- 3.2.2.1 the institution’s mission;**
- 3.2.2.2 the fiscal stability of the institution;**
- 3.2.2.3 institutional policy, including policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services; and**
- 3.2.2.4 related foundations (athletic, research, etc.) and other corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution and/or its programs.**

Rationale and Notes:

The governing board of an institution typically has legal authority and responsibility for the institution’s mission, its financial stability, institutional policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services, and related foundations and corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution. When the governing board does not retain sole legal authority and operating control, the institution clearly outlines the active control of functions and foundations and how they relate to the board. The institution has a clear definition of legal authority and operating control relative to any corporate entities in which the institution has a (legally) defined interest, any external foundations established to support the institution, directly or indirectly, and any government agencies or boards with administrative missions or operating authority that affect the institution.

Related foundations and other corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution or its programs can at best be a major source of strength to the quality and success of the institution and, at worst, be an interfering body that uses its resources to control, inappropriately influence, or manage the institution. It is critical to assure that the institution does not become so reliant on an outside foundation that its autonomy is compromised and its continued functioning is put in jeopardy. Therefore, this standard expects that the institution’s legal authority and operating control of these foundations will be clearly defined.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What entity or entities regularly examine the mission and the financial stability of the institution and issue opinions regarding their findings?
- Are adequate definitions of legal authority and operating responsibility clearly stated in the rules and regulations, policy manuals, and/or bylaws of the institution’s governing board?
- What evidence shows that the institution has access to adequate information about affiliated corporate entities and/or auxiliary services to determine compliance with this Comprehensive Standard?

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- What is the mission of each foundation and is it consistent with the mission of the institution it supports?
  - Does the financial position of the foundation affect the financial soundness of the institution?
  - What structures are in place to assure that the leadership of the foundation and the institution are separate but work cooperatively? How is this evaluated?

Sample Documentation:

- Charter and bylaws of the board and related entities
- Minutes of board meetings and related entities
- Comprehensive financial statements of the board and all related entities
- Mission statements and organizational charts of affiliated corporate entities and/or auxiliary operations
- Rules and regulations, policy manuals, bylaws, meeting minutes, and relevant correspondence for the institution and affiliated corporate entities and/or auxiliary services
- Mission statement of each foundation
- Appropriate contracts and other formal agreements with each foundation

**3.2.3 The board has a policy addressing conflict of interest for its members.**

Rationale and Notes:

To maintain the integrity of the educational enterprise, those responsible for establishing broad institutional policies should be free of inappropriate influence and avoid even the appearance of any conflict of interest as they carry out their duties. This standard assumes publication and consistent implementation of the policy.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the conflict of interest policy for board members?
- How are board members informed of its existence?
- How does the conflict of interest policy apply to individuals on the board as well as to the collective actions taken by the board as a corporate entity?
- How does the policy protect the integrity of the institution?

Sample Documentation:

- Board bylaws defining conflict of interest
- Policy statement on conflict of interest as applies to board members

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### **3.2.4 The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious, or other external bodies, and protects the institution from such influence.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Effective governing boards adhere to the laws and regulations that underpin the institution's legitimacy while championing its right to operate without unreasonable intrusions by governmental and nongovernmental agencies and entities. The board protects and preserves the institution's independence from outside pressures.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- To what extent and what means are board members educated regarding these responsibilities?
- What safeguards are in place that protect the institution?
- How does the institution show that its governing board members are free from undue influences?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Composition of the board and documentation of board member selection
- Institutional policies and bylaws that protect the institution from unwarranted intrusion by external forces
- Documents and reports of board actions that have resolved issues regarding pressures by external agencies

### **3.2.5 Members of the governing board can be dismissed only for cause and by due process.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Members of the governing board need to exercise their responsibilities without fear of retaliatory measures, such as removal from office by arbitrary or capricious means. Establishing provisions for the removal of a governing board member protects the institution from behaviors inconsistent with the role of governing board members. Substantive and procedural processes protect the interests of the institution and the members of the governing board.

**Note:** In June 2005 the Commission adopted an interpretation of this standard that requires an institution to have a policy that outlines grounds for dismissal and a fair process for review. Please refer to Commission policy "Interpretations of CS 3.2.5 and CS 3.2.12" available at [www.sac-scoc.org](http://www.sac-scoc.org).

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the policy that governs the removal of a governing board member from office?
- Does the policy specify cause for dismissal and describe a fair process for dismissal?

Sample Documentation:

- Governing board policies
- Governing board minutes

**3.2.6 There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy.**

Rationale and Notes:

Effective governance includes clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, administration, and faculty and that each of these groups adheres to their appropriate roles and responsibilities. It is important that the mission and policies of the institution are approved by the board but that their implementation and evaluation are delegated to the administration and faculty in order to prevent the board from undercutting the authority of the president and other members of the administration and faculty, thereby creating an unhealthy and unworkable governance structure. To ensure a clear understanding of separate roles and responsibilities, they should be delineated in writing, approved by the board, and disseminated to all appropriate constituents.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists that the organizational structure reflects a distinction in lines of authority?
- What is the institution's written policy on the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, administration, and faculty?
- How are written policies communicated to constituents?

Sample Documentation:

- Bylaws of the institution
- Board policy manual
- Faculty manual
- Minutes of board meetings that reflect practice

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### **3.2.7 The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

The institution's administrative/organizational structure is designed to support the institution's mission, goals, and priorities. Effective institutions ensure that administrative responsibilities for policy implementation are accessible and clear to key constituents. The distribution of organizational charts and policies and procedures manuals provides the necessary foundation for internal and external understanding of the institution's operations.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Where is the organizational structure published?
- How is the organizational structure consistent with the written policies governing roles and responsibilities of the board, administration, and faculty?
- How does the institution publish and disseminate its organizational structure?
- What evidence exists that other documents, such as board manuals, minutes, and administrative procedures manuals illustrate the distinction?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Administrative/organizational chart and job descriptions
- Bylaws of the institution
- Institutional handbook and manuals
- Description of the process by which major institutional policies are decided, implemented, and evaluated

### **3.2.8 The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

In order to ensure that an institution has effective leadership to accomplish its mission, it employs academic and administrative staff with the credentials and expertise appropriate to the duties and responsibilities associated with their positions.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists showing that persons holding key leadership positions in the institution are qualified to carry out their responsibilities?
- If staff with nontraditional credentials have been appointed, what evidence in their background and experience justifies their employment?

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- What evaluation mechanisms are in place for the periodic review of the institution's academic and administrative officers?

Sample Documentation:

- Organizational chart, names of those appointed to academic and administrative posts, and position descriptions
- Curricula vitae and transcripts for senior-level academic and administrative officers
- Written performance evaluations of academic and administrative officers

**3.2.9 The institution defines and publishes policies regarding the appointment and employment of faculty and staff.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard indicates that an institution will identify and establish terms and conditions of employment that are periodically assessed and widely disseminated to demonstrate that the institution employs personnel with sufficient qualifications to maintain its operations and achieve goals consistent with its educational mission.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies regarding the appointment and employment of faculty and staff?
- How are such policies developed and approved?
- How are the policies disseminated to ensure that faculty and staff are informed?
- What evidence shows that employment practices are consistent with the policy?

Sample Documentation:

- Faculty and staff manuals
- Documentation that faculty and staff are informed about the appointment and employment policies affecting them

**3.2.10 The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.**

Rationale and Notes:

In order for the institution to demonstrate its overall effectiveness, administrators, including the chief executive officer, are periodically evaluated regarding their achievement of performance objectives that in turn are linked to institutional effectiveness measures. Regular evaluations contribute to the continuing development of the institution.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the process for periodically evaluating the effectiveness of administrators and the president?
- How are the findings from evaluations used to improve performance of administrators?

Sample Documentation:

- Administrative policies for the evaluation of administrators
- Documentation of the use of the evaluations
- Board minutes related to the evaluation of the chief executive officer

**3.2.11 The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for, and exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over, the institution's intercollegiate athletics program.**

Rationale and Notes:

The institution's intercollegiate athletics program often influences the institution's visibility and stature, helps define its image, provides external financial support, and often is a major operation with a significant financial impact on the institution. It is important that the chief executive officer has ultimate and active responsibility for appropriate administrative and financial control of the institution's intercollegiate athletics program, including the academic performance of athletes.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution's chief executive officer have administrative and financial control over intercollegiate athletics, including athletics policies and procedures, operating budgets, recruiting standards, and academic performance standards for athletes?
- What is the working relationship between the institution's chief executive officer and the athletics compliance officer or athletics director?
- If an external foundation has been established to support intercollegiate athletics, what evidence indicates that the institution's chief executive officer has adequate information and control to ensure that the foundation conducts activities in a manner consistent with the institution's mission and with other external oversight bodies without compromising the integrity of the institution?

Sample Documentation:

- Job description of the institution's chief executive officer

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- Documentation of the reporting arrangements of the athletics director
  - Documentation indicating the office with ultimate authority for intercollegiate athletics operating budgets and fund-raising initiatives
  - Policies and regulations related to intercollegiate athletics and the president's oversight and relationship to outside foundations
  - Documentation showing the working relationship between the institution's chief executive officer and intercollegiate athletics compliance officer

**3.2.12 The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate control of the institution's fund-raising activities.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard refers to internal institutional fund raising and not independent, separately incorporated foundations. The achievement of an institution's mission is often dependent on successful fund raising. Therefore, the institution's chief executive officer has ultimate control of the institution's fund-raising activities because fund-raising activities need to support the institution's priorities as established by the governing board. It is the responsibility of the chief executive officer to monitor these priorities.

**Note:** CS 3.2.12 refers to fund raising and foundations controlled by the institution; CS 3.2.13 refers to independent, separately incorporated foundations.

In June 2005 the Commission adopted an interpretation of this standard that requires an institution to have a policy that outlines grounds for dismissal and a fair process for review. Please refer to Commission policy "Interpretations of CS 3.2.5 and CS 3.2.12" available at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the reporting arrangements of the fund-raising staff?
- How are fund-raising activities informed by the institution's mission?
- What is the written policy on the oversight of fund raising?
- What evidence exists that fund-raising activities by board members, alumni groups, or others are coordinated by the chief executive officer or the person so delegated these responsibilities?

Sample Documentation:

- The job description of the chief executive officer
- Appropriate policies and procedures manual
- Organizational chart
- Minutes of any fund-raising committees

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**3.2.13 Any institution-related foundation not controlled by the institution has a contractual or other formal agreement that (a) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation, and (b) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard refers to separately incorporated independent entities. These entities exist to complement an institution’s educational purposes and contribute to its overall effectiveness. This relationship is clearly defined and documented so that each party has an understanding regarding benefits derived from the relationship. The mutual benefits of the relationship can help ensure that an institution cannot become excessively dependent on a foundation. Often, such foundations exist to raise private gifts to supplement other institutional resources and to manage their distribution. They may, however, also assume responsibility for other institutionally related activities such as hospitals, research enterprises, and residence halls. The relationship between the institution and foundation needs to be consistent with the institution’s mission.

**Note:** CS 3.2.13 refers to independent, separately incorporated foundations; CS 3.2.12 refers to fund raising and foundations controlled by the institution.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the contractual agreements between the foundation(s) and the institution?
- How does the agreement accurately describe the relationship between the foundation and the institution?
- How does the agreement describe an institutional liability associated with that relationship?
- How is the foundation’s purpose consistent with the institutional mission?

Sample Documentation:

- Copies of bylaws for each foundation
- Copies of other foundation publications
- Mission statements for the institution and the foundation(s)
- Contracts or other formal agreements that define the relationship between the foundation and the institution or with other third party agencies

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**3.2.14 The institution’s policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of all intellectual property. This (policy) applies to students, faculty, and staff.**

Rationale and Notes:

Intellectual property is an important asset to the educational community and to a broad range of intellectual endeavors. Consequently, the rights to intellectual property—a term used to denote legal rights to products of the mind and the intended or unintended access to such property whether by electronic, oral, written, or other methods—require clear institutional direction regarding ownership, compensation, copyrights, and use of revenue derived from such property as the issue pertains to students, faculty, and staff. Policies outlining such rights apply to students, faculty, and staff.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution define and identify intellectual property?
- Who owns the intellectual property?
- What are the policies governing the use of intellectual property?
- How does the institution disseminate policies on intellectual rights?
- How does the institution resolve emerging issues and disputes regarding intellectual property?
- How are faculty, staff, and students informed about intellectual property policies and procedures?

Sample Documentation:

- Administrative policies that govern intellectual property
- Academic policies that govern intellectual property
- Student handbook containing policies that govern intellectual property

**3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard addresses the process of assessment that supports the institution’s administrative and educational support services and serves as the cornerstone of institutional effectiveness. For academic programs and for administrative and educational support services, institutional effectiveness focuses on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning.

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**Note:** CS 3.3.1 focuses on the full range of programs, services, and activities offered by the institution to include educational programs. CS 3.4.1 specifically requires an institution to establish and evaluate learning outcomes for each educational program for which academic credit is offered. CS 3.3.1 underscores the overarching expectation for a comprehensive approach to planning and evaluation in all aspects of an institution. (See also the note under CR 2.5)

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How are expected outcomes clearly defined in measurable terms for each educational program as well as for administrative and educational support services?
- What is the evidence of assessment activities for each educational, administrative, and educational support unit?
- What is the evidence for broad-based participation in assessment activities?
- How are periodic reviews in which programmatic outcomes such as retention, graduation rates, employer and alumni satisfaction, and the like assessed, reviewed, and used for improvements?
- How does the institution's use of assessment results improve educational programs and administrative and educational support services?

Sample Documentation:

- Documentation of goals and expected outcomes for educational programs and for administrative and educational support services
- Documentation of the evaluation of those outcomes
- Documentation of the use of the findings from assessment to improve the institution

**3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.**

Rationale and Notes:

The tradition of shared governance within American higher education recognizes the importance of both faculty and administrative involvement in the approval of educational programs. Approval by the faculty ensures that programs contain appropriate courses reflecting current knowledge within a discipline and that they are appropriate for the students enrolled. Approval by the administration affirms that educational programs are consistent with the mission of the institution and that the institution possesses both the organization and resources to ensure the quality of its educational programs.

The expectation is that the institution will engage in ongoing planning and evaluation to ensure that, for each academic program, the institution develops and assesses student learning outcomes.

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Program and learning outcomes are grounded in the faculty’s knowledge of the content and coherence of the discipline as well as in the learning process and reflect expectations for performance consistent with the level of the program and the mission of the institution. Program and learning outcomes specify the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes students are expected to attain in courses or in a program. Methods for evaluating the extent to which students achieve these outcomes are appropriate to the nature of the discipline and consistent over time to enable the institution to evaluate cohorts of students who complete courses or a program. Shared widely within and across programs, the results of this evaluation can affirm the institution’s success at achieving its mission and can be used to inform decisions about curricular and programmatic revisions. At appropriate intervals, program and learning outcomes and evaluation methods are evaluated and revised as appropriate.

**Note:** CR 2.5, CS 3.3.1, and CS 3.4.1 all relate directly to institutional effectiveness but each addresses a different aspect. CR 2.5 requires an institution to have in place an effective *process* for producing institutional improvement and for accomplishing its mission. CS 3.3.1 requires that an institution identify outcomes (resulting from the process required in CR 2.5), evaluate *achievement of those outcomes*, and *demonstrate improvement* based on the results of that evaluation. This applies to all educational programs and all administrative and support services. CS 3.4.1 requires that each educational program offered for academic credit establish and evaluate *student learning outcomes*.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the process for developing and approving educational programs and who is responsible?
- What are the program and learning outcomes for all educational programs, including majors, minors, general education and other institution-wide programs, including distance-learning programs?
- How has the institution evaluated the extent to which students are achieving expected outcomes?
- How has the institution used the results of evaluating student achievement?
- What evidence exists that the institution has established student learning outcomes in all settings, including distance learning, and that they are assessed within the institutional mission?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and procedures for approving educational programs
- Minutes from faculty and administrative meetings
- Representative examples of program and learning outcomes for each educational program.
- Descriptions of methods for evaluating student achievement of these outcomes
- Reports of the results of evaluation, examples of how the results have been used for

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program improvement, and examples of how methods of evaluation have been improved over time

### **3.4.2 The institution’s continuing education, outreach, and service programs are consistent with the institution’s mission.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

This standard recognizes a clear distinction between credit and noncredit activities and reinforces that, when such outreach activities are in place, they should be consistent with the institution’s mission.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists that demonstrates that continuing education, outreach, and public service programs are consistent with the institution’s mission?
- What evidence exists that demonstrates that continuing education, outreach, and public service programs are regularly evaluated in relation to the institution’s mission?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Policies regarding the role and scope of continuing education, outreach, and public service as they relate to the institution’s mission
- Examples of program offerings in continuing education, outreach, and public service including information about the audiences served
- Documentation that continuing education, outreach, and public service activities are regularly evaluated with respect to the institution’s mission and program goals

### **3.4.3 The institution publishes admissions policies consistent with its mission.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Sound admission policies are defined in relation to the institution’s higher education mission and are designed to ensure that students who are admitted to the institution or to a specific program can benefit from the institution’s programs. Implicit in the policy is that the institution consistently applies the policy to all applicants and transfers; exceptions are limited and based on specific criteria for waiving admission requirements.

Sound admissions policies for the institution or a specific program conform to widely accepted higher education standards for admissions and define all admissions categories used by the institution, such as transfer, transient, non-degree, audit, honors, and probation or conditional.

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Admissions policies are published in official documents and communicated accurately and effectively to prospective students and other constituents.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the admissions policies for the institution and for specific programs and how are they based on widely accepted standards for undergraduate and graduate applicants?
- What evidence exists that admissions policies for the institution and for specific programs are consistent with the stated mission of the institution?
- What evidence exists that the standards for admissions to the institution and specific programs are clear, reasonable, and consistently implemented?
- How does the institution show that admissions requirements are appropriate to identify qualified students who have the ability to complete a program successfully?
- How does the institution disseminate admissions policies and are they uniform in all publications?

Sample Documentation:

- Undergraduate and graduate catalogs that include admissions policies, standards, and procedures
- Institutional and specific program brochures and other recruitment materials stating admissions policies and procedures
- Documents describing how the institution evaluates applications and makes admissions decisions
- Minutes or other documents showing evidence that the institution regularly evaluates its admissions policies in accordance with good practices in higher education
- System policy or legislation regarding admissions policies and procedures

**3.4.4 The institution has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures that coursework and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution’s own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any coursework or credit recorded on the institution’s transcript.**

**Note:** See also the following Commission policies: “International Institutions: Affiliate or Technical Assistance Relationships,” and “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit” posted at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

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### Rationale and Notes:

The key to this standard lies in the concept of “comparability” and assessing responsibility for academic quality since, by awarding credit for learning outside its own educational programs, an institution affirms that students have achieved the knowledge, skills, and experiences comparable to those attained by students who have completed the institution’s own educational programs. Policies for approval of transfer credit, advanced placement, experiential learning, and professional certificates are developed, implemented, and published in catalogs and other documents that are made available to prospective students.

Good practices supporting academic quality in these areas include: (1) linking transfer credit, including credits earned at a foreign/international institution, to clearly defined outcomes for courses and programs; (2) delineating the basis for advanced placement credit awarded for achievements outside commonly accepted programs; and (3) awarding credit for experiential learning and professional certifications based on well-documented activities and experiences at the appropriate educational level and evaluated based on clearly developed outcomes for the courses or program for which credit is awarded.

**Note:** CS 3.4.4 refers to credit awarded for experiential learning and other life experiences and accomplishments; CS 3.4.8 refers to the conversion of noncredit to credit for coursework taken.

### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates and are they consistent with the mission?
- How are the policies developed and evaluated to ensure comparability to the institution’s own degree programs?
- How does the institution publish the policies and make them available to students?
- How does the institution ensure that coursework and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level?
- How does the institution demonstrate responsibility for the academic quality of the following work or credit recorded on the institution’s transcript: (1) articulation or other agreements with institutions from which students frequently transfer credits; (2) other transfer credit for courses or programs; (3) advanced placement; (4) experiential learning; and (5) certificates or other professional education outside a collegiate degree program? In all cases, how does the institution ensure that students receiving credit for such programs have achieved the same knowledge, skills, and experiences as those who have completed its own educational programs?
- What evidence shows that the institution periodically reviews and revises policies for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit?

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Sample Documentation:

- Catalogs and other documents describing policies for awarding credit
- A description of how transfer of credit policies are developed and implemented
- Descriptions of how decisions are made to accept and award credit from other institutions or organizations, including how the institution ensures that coursework and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and are comparable to the institution's own degree programs
- Copies of articulation or transfer agreements with other institutions or organizations, including agreements between two-year and senior institutions that involve transcription or transferring credits for coursework leading to a degree
- Documents or descriptions of contracts, study abroad and student exchange agreements, or other arrangements with institutions or organizations inside or outside the United States that involve transcription or transferring credits for coursework leading to a degree
- Description of the process of awarding experiential credit, including how the institution ensures that coursework and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and are comparable to the institution's own degree programs
- Description or documentation of periodic review and evaluation of the institution's credit policies

**3.4.5 The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution.**

Rationale and Notes:

Good educational practice presumes that an institution's academic policies are developed in concert with the appropriate input and participation of the affected constituencies and conform with generally accepted practices and policies of higher education. Each institution develops academic policies—such as grading policies, withdrawals, degree completion requirements—that are appropriate to its programs and students and that accurately portray its programs and services. Good educational practice presumes that these academic policies lead to a teaching and learning environment that enhances student learning and further implies that each institution engages in a process of program review. Faculty members assume responsibility for determining good educational practice and therefore should have a substantive role in the development and review of academic policies.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution determine good academic practices within the context of its mission?

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- How are academic policies developed, approved, and reviewed?
  - What is the role of faculty in the development and approval process?
  - To what extent are the institution's academic policies made available to those constituencies affected by the policies?
  - What is the approval process for print and other media material that the institution uses to portray itself to the general public and potential students?

Sample Documentation:

- List of academic policies
- Documents (including websites) which contain academic policies such as catalogs, student handbook, policy handbook, faculty handbook
- Faculty Handbook or other documents/Web pages that include a description of the process by which academic policies are developed, approved, and reviewed
- Publications and other material that portray the institution to potential students and the general public
- Minutes of meetings in which academic policies are modified or approved

**3.4.6 The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery.**

Rationale and Notes:

Good educational practices in higher education assume that institutions adopt sound and generally acceptable procedures for determining what a credit unit means for graduate and undergraduate coursework taking into account the amount and level of credit for courses. Nontraditional coursework may vary in format but is equivalent in expected learning outcomes. When undergraduate and graduate courses are offered through nontraditional delivery, the institution awards credit compatible with sound academic practice in the field. The institution gives attention to principles developed by nationally recognized organizations, such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, when developing the type of credit and the amount of credit awarded.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- If the institution awards credit for courses delivered in an alternative format, how does the institution ensure that the process for determining the amount of credit is equivalent to the credit earned in the same or similar courses delivered in other formats?
- What are the policies that determine the level and amount of credit awarded for undergraduate and graduate coursework?

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- In developing policies related to the amount and level of credit awarded, how does the institution use the standards of professional organizations or the practices of peer institutions?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies, guidelines, and written procedures for establishing and evaluating the amount and level of credit to be awarded for a course
- Catalog identifying credits assigned to courses and types of instructional modes if nontraditional

**3.4.7 The institution ensures the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortial relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution.**

Rationale and Notes:

A consortial relationship typically is one in which two or more institutions share in the responsibility to develop courses and programs that meet mutually agreed-upon standards of academic quality. A contractual agreement typically is one in which an institution enters an agreement for receipt of courses/programs or portions of courses or programs (i.e., clinical training, internships, etc.) delivered by another institution or service provider. The institution is responsible for ensuring the quality of all such coursework included on its students' transcripts as credit earned from the institution and for ensuring that the quality of such programs meets the standards required of similar programs.

An evaluation process that delineates the responsibility and role of all parties to the agreement is basic to the institution's ability to ensure the quality of the educational programs and courses covered by the agreements. Regular evaluation and comparison of program and course offerings against the institutional mission are also important in establishing educational quality.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution define "consortium" and "contract" with respect to programs/courses?
- How does an institution's contract or consortial agreement provide for the following: (1) a clear indication of the responsibilities of all parties to the agreement; (2) provision for ensuring the quality of the programs and courses offered through the agreement; and (3) provision for evaluating the agreement in relation to the purposes of the institution?

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- What is the institution’s process for ensuring the quality of programs and courses offered through contract or consortial agreements?
  - How does the process involve all parties to the agreement?

Sample Documentation:

- Contracts and consortial agreements that clearly stipulate the responsibility of each party to ensure program and course quality
- Evidence that the institution evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution

**3.4.8 The institution awards academic credit for coursework taken on a noncredit basis only when there is documentation that the noncredit coursework is equivalent to a designated credit experience.**

Rationale and Notes:

All coursework taken for academic credit should have rigor, substance, and standards connected to established learning outcomes. When academic credit is granted for noncredit courses, the institution demonstrates and documents that the noncredit course work is equivalent to the designated credit experience. A sound academic practice typically involves faculty participation in the evaluation of such credit.

An institution awarding academic credit for coursework taken on a noncredit basis has a process for evaluating and determining that noncredit coursework is equivalent to a designated credit experience. The processes are reviewed on a systematic and periodic basis in light of established guidelines for accepting academic credit for work taken on a noncredit basis such as the American Council on Education, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, as well as other specific organizations.

**Note:** CS 3.4.8 refers to the conversion of noncredit to credit for coursework taken; CS 3.4.4 refers to credit awarded for experiential learning and other life experiences and accomplishments.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies used to describe the circumstances in which academic credit is awarded for coursework taken on a noncredit basis?
- How does the institution determine whether the student has achieved through the noncredit course the same level of proficiency as required in a credit course?

Sample Documentation:

- Appropriate policy statements describing the process for determining that noncredit coursework is equivalent to credit coursework

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- Evidence that policies are published, implemented, and enforced

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

#### Rationale and Notes:

Academic support services pertain to students at all levels and to faculty and are consistent with the institution's mission, enhance the educational experience, and contribute to the achievement of teaching and learning outcomes. Student and faculty success is affected by the learning environment. An institution provides appropriate academic support services to strengthen academic programs and ensure the success of students and faculty in meeting the goals of the educational programs. Academic support services may include, but are not limited to, academic teaching and resource centers, tutoring, academic advising, counseling, disability services, resource centers, adequate library, laboratories, information technology, and mentoring.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What academic support programs exist for faculty and students?
- How does the institution ensure that its academic support programs and services are adequate and appropriate to the needs of its faculty and students?
- How does the institution ensure that students and faculty have knowledge of and access to academic support programs?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Documents (e.g., catalog, student handbook, advising handbook) and Web sites (e.g., academic support services) explaining how support services are provided and how services can be accessed
- Data on the frequency of usage of academic support services by students and faculty
- Information about how academic support services are evaluated and how the results are used to improve services

### **3.4.10 The institution defines and publishes general education requirements for its undergraduate programs and major program requirements for all its programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

The institution is responsible for determining course learning outcomes for each educational program. The general education program defines the underlying learning experience that supports the institution's mission and traditionally provides the "breadth"

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component to an undergraduate education. Through general education, students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge that introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for each student. An effective general education program has underlying rationale and design with goals consistent with the mission of the institution.

Major program requirements allow for an integrated understanding of the discipline. Such programs, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level, display a clear rationale and design and include clearly stated and measurable goals consistent with the mission of the institution. Each major course of study identifies courses that are designed as introductions to the major, required courses, electives, capstone courses, and any co-requisite courses. Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary majors, or majors within traditional disciplines that deviate substantially from commonly accepted major requirements, require a greater degree of definition and rationale.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- For each undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree program, what evidence exists that the institution (1) designs each program, (2) publishes goals for each program, and (3) provides an identifiable set of experiences for students in each program?
- What is the process for determining what coursework is included in the general education requirements?
- What is the process for determining what coursework is included in the major program requirements?
- How does the institution provide information about its educational programs, including philosophy, goals, and required courses, that is sufficient for a student to make informed choices?
- What role does the faculty play in the design and assessment of each program?
- How does the institution demonstrate that all appropriate documents, print and otherwise, provide clear, complete, and consistent information about each major program?

Sample Documentation:

- For all educational programs, evidence that the institution has published documents, including the catalog and recruitment materials, that describe general education and program completion requirements
- For major program requirements and the general education program, (1) comparative data for degree programs with peer institutions, (2) professional accreditation, and (3) external program reviews
- Minutes of curriculum committee meetings

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

Rationale and Notes:

This standard acknowledges the responsibility of the institution to oversee the release and use of student academic records and identifies three key aspects of that responsibility: security, confidentiality, and integrity. As applied to this standard, integrity means to ensure that data within the records are not changed without appropriate oversight and sufficient security measures. Special security measures emphasize the imperative for the institution to protect confidentiality of records, preserve the integrity of its students' academic records, and oversee the release of records in accord with state and federal mandates and commonly accepted standards and practices among institutions of higher learning.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What policies and procedures govern the management of student academic records?
- How does the institution manage the physical security of record storage?
- How does the institution manage the security of electronic data storage systems, paper storage, and/or other storage?
- What is the institution's disaster plan for records retrieval?
- 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 Documentation:

- Catalogs, handbooks, and other publications used by students and personnel that (1) discuss student academic records, including statements addressing confidentiality of student records; and (2) identify specific policies for the security of academic 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 and know policies on the confidentiality, integrity, and security of student academic records

**3.4.12 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty.**

Rationale and Notes:

The curriculum is directly related to the institution's mission and the educational degrees, certificates, and diplomas. This standard assumes that the faculty has primary

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responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum.

The route for curriculum approval is typically through faculty-controlled processes that begin at the department or program level followed by appropriate approvals within and external to the institution. Initiation of and responsibility for curriculum *content* is faculty driven. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the faculty to assess periodically the curriculum for quality and effectiveness and make changes as appropriate.

When reviewing the *quality* of its curriculum, the institution might consider characteristics such as the following: (1) currency and relevancy of the theories and practices in the field or discipline; (2) intellectual rigor appropriate to the level of the degree program; or (3) the “connectivity” among the components of the curriculum.

When considering the *effectiveness* of its curriculum, the faculty establishes learning outcomes of the curriculum and assesses the extent to which these outcomes are being achieved. Consequently, the characteristics for assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum might include the extent to which the curriculum provides opportunities for (1) increasingly complex understandings of theories, principles, and practices; (2) increasingly complex levels of analysis and development of skills; and (3) application of theories and principles.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the process for the development, approval, evaluation, and improvement of the curriculum?
- What are the policies and procedures for expanding or limiting the curriculum and what are the faculty’s responsibilities?
- How does the institution ensure the quality and effectiveness of its curriculum so that it is appropriate to its educational programs? What standards for review of curriculum quality does the institution use?
- How does the institution ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the institution’s mission and program offerings?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Faculty handbook, current curriculum development policy or manuals, minutes of curriculum committees describing the role and responsibility of faculty in determining the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum
- Curriculum evaluations conducted by faculty showing attention to curriculum quality and effectiveness

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**3.4.13 For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard assumes that individuals competent in the field oversee all majors or curricular areas or areas of concentration in undergraduate and graduate degree programs in order to ensure that each contains essential curricular components, has appropriate content and pedagogy, and maintains currency in the degree. Degree programs normally are coordinated by academically qualified faculty who hold degree credentials or other qualifications appropriate to the degree offered. If responsibility for coordination for curriculum development and review are assigned to persons other than faculty, then the institution should provide appropriate documentation.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists that the coordinator for each major, curricular area, or concentration in an undergraduate or graduate degree program has the qualifications and credentials for leadership in the development and review of the curriculum?
- What evidence exists that the coordinator provides oversight for assessing the quality of the curriculum for the respective undergraduate or graduate degree programs and for ensuring that the curriculum, as well as the delivery of the curriculum, is educationally sound?

Sample Documentation:

- List of program coordinators, their areas of responsibility, and their qualifications
- Description of coordinator responsibilities

**3.4.14 The institution’s use of technology enhances student learning, is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs, and ensures that students have access to and training in the use of technology.**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard addresses the appropriate use of technology to enhance student learning, meet program objectives, and enrich resources available to students and faculty. It is the institution’s responsibility to provide opportunities for students and faculty to develop competencies in the use of technology. In addition to formal training, other opportunities for developing competencies in technology can be provided through access to tech-

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nology laboratories for students, residence halls where computers are networked with other learners and units, and access to technology for presentation of material, and other means.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How is the institution using technology to enhance student learning?
- What evidence exists that technology is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs?
- How does the institution ensure faculty and student access to technology and to the training, use, and applications of technology?

Sample Documentation:

- Documents that contain policies and procedures for the use of technology to enhance student learning
- Evidence that the use of technology in teaching and learning is appropriate and effective
- Evidence that students and faculty have sufficient opportunity for access and training in the use of technology (e.g., schedules and usage patterns)
- Evidence that the institution assesses competencies of students in the use of technology and uses the results for continuous program improvements

**3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies.**

Rationale and Notes:

Since the general education core is central to educational programs, this standard assumes that the institution will define specifically which competencies are appropriate to the goals of its general education program and consistent with principles of good practice. The institution is responsible for identifying measures to ensure that students have attained those competencies.

**Note:** This standard addresses college-level competencies within the general education core; it does not require a specific course to address each competency.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the specific college-level competencies within the general education program?

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- What evidence is available to show that students have attained these competencies?
  - How does the institution demonstrate that it identifies competencies that are college-level?

Sample Documentation:

- Identification of competencies
- Documentation of justification for defining and evaluating the college-level general education competencies
- Evidence that graduates of undergraduate degree programs have attained the college-level competencies

**3.5.2 The institution awards degrees only to those students who have earned at least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree through instruction offered by that institution. (See the Commission’s policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”)**

Rationale and Notes:

This standard establishes the general principle that if an institution awards an academic degree, then it is responsible for the delivery of an appropriate portion of the academic experiences applicable to the degree. The standard also establishes the threshold for determining the acceptable portion of coursework that the institution ought to provide for the degree.

**Note:** The Commission’s policy, “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit,” provides for the term “institution” to be interpreted as a “system of statewide institutions” when it is a formal consortium of institutions accredited by the Commission on Colleges.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What evidence exists that the institution has a policy stating the amount of credit that must be earned through instruction by the institution?
- How does the institution monitor the amount of credit earned at the institution with respect to the total number of credits required for the degree?
- If an institution is part of a consortium, how is the policy on transfer and transcripts of academic credit implemented?
- How are the policies disseminated?
- How does an institution identify on its transcript the name of the institution from which a course was taken?

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Sample Documentation:

- Evidence that verifies that at least 25 percent of the credits required for the degree have been taken at the institution
- Applicable degree completion policies

**3.6.1 The institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, and its master’s and doctoral degree programs, are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs.**

Rationale and Notes:

The course content of post-baccalaureate degree programs, as determined by faculty, is progressively more complex and rigorous than undergraduate courses and is consistent with the expectation of higher education institutions. These advanced degree programs build upon the foundation established by undergraduate programs. Requirements in courses not specifically designed for graduate credit but that allow both undergraduate and graduate enrollment ensure that there is a clear distinction between the learning outcomes of undergraduate students and graduate students.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How has the institution clearly defined the content and rigor of post-baccalaureate degree programs?
- What evidence exists that the institution has learning outcomes for post-baccalaureate professional degree programs and its master’s and doctoral programs indicating that the programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs?

Sample Documentation:

- College catalogs, policies and procedures, and course syllabi or other documents that show differentiation in undergraduate and post-baccalaureate programs
- For programs within the same discipline offered at different degree levels, samples of learning outcomes at each level and intended student achievement for outcomes assessed
- Course syllabi describing the advanced body of learning to be accomplished through completion of post-baccalaureate coursework

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### **3.6.2 The institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Effective graduate instruction fosters independent learning so that graduates have the ability to work and learn independently and contribute to a profession or field of study. Although the extent to which students are expected to demonstrate independent learning will vary with the level of the graduate degree, faculty within graduate programs define the skills and knowledge required and evaluate the ability of students to engage in independent learning.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How do admissions policies for graduate programs ensure that students are prepared to develop skills for independent learning?
- How do the learning outcomes for graduate programs reflect expectations that students will demonstrate independent learning skills?
- What evidence exists that syllabi and degree requirements for graduate programs include activities that foster independent learning?
- How does the institution evaluate students' independent learning skills?
- How does the institution ensure that students are well prepared for the independent learning required in graduate programs?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Degree requirements and syllabi including requirements that foster independent learning
- Program and learning outcomes defining expectations for independent learning
- Examples of independent research projects, portfolios, theses, dissertations, or other examples demonstrating independent learning by graduates
- Evidence that resources are adequate to allow graduate students to work and learn independently

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**3.6.3 The majority of credits toward a graduate or post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through the institution awarding the degree. In the case of graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortial arrangements, the student earns a majority of credits from the participating institutions. (See also Commission’s policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”)**

Rationale and Notes:

An institution is responsible for the integrity of its graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs. The institution establishes policies that ensure that a majority of credits is earned through the institution awarding the degree. For the purposes of this standard, the term “institution” is to be interpreted as a “system of statewide institutions” when it is a formal consortium of institutions accredited by the Commission on Colleges. If the institution is part of a consortium or a cooperative degree program, the agreement ensures that all students earn a majority of credits from the institutions participating in the arrangements.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the institution’s policy regarding the number of credit hours toward a degree that must be earned through the institution awarding the degree?
- How does the institution train staff to implement these policies?
- If an institution offers degree programs through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, then how does the institution implement its policies for awarding its degrees?
- How does the institution identify credit on transcripts earned at another institution but counted toward the degree awarded at the institution?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies, procedures, and any operational manuals regarding the awarding of credit
- Examples of the implementation of those policies
- Documents describing the dissemination of the policies

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**3.7.1. The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline in accordance with the guidelines listed below. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty.**

*Credential Guidelines:*

- a. Faculty teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level: doctoral or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).*
- b. Faculty teaching associate degree courses designed for transfer to a baccalaureate degree: doctoral or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).*
- c. Faculty teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree: bachelor's degree in the teaching discipline, or associate's degree and demonstrated competencies in the teaching discipline.*
- d. Faculty teaching baccalaureate courses: doctoral or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline). At least 25 percent of the discipline course hours in each undergraduate major are taught by faculty members holding the terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate—in the discipline.*
- e. Faculty teaching graduate and post-baccalaureate course work: earned doctorate/terminal degree in the teaching discipline or a related discipline.*
- f. Graduate teaching assistants: master's in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations.*

Rationale and Notes

This standard asserts the fundamental principle that qualified, effective faculty members are essential to carrying out the goals of the mission of the institution and ensuring the quality and integrity of the academic programs of the institution. The emphasis is on overall qualifications rather than simply academic credentials and that, while academic credentials are primary and in most cases will be the standard qualification for faculty members, other types of qualifications may prove to be appropriate. It is also important to note that the documentation and justification of qualifications for each member of the faculty are the responsibility of the institution.

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**Note:** The Commission suggests that institutions use the Commission’s “Faculty Roster Form for Full-time and Part-Time Faculty” or a similar format providing the same information to report the qualifications of faculty. The following faculty should be reported: all full-time and part-time faculty teaching credit courses that can be part of a degree, certificate, diploma, or other credential; faculty teaching developmental or remedial courses; and teaching assistants who are the instructors of record.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the mission of the institution influence the determination of the qualifications of the faculty in order to meet its goals?
- How does the institution determine the competencies of members of the faculty and justify that the qualifications of the members of the faculty meet these competencies?
- How does the institution document and justify the qualifications for each member of the faculty?

Sample Documentation:

- A complete roster of faculty, qualifications, and teaching assignments (see the Commission’s “Faculty Roster Form for Full-time and Part-Time Faculty”)
- Policies governing the qualifications of members of the faculty necessary to carry out the mission of the institution and the process for the selection of members of the faculty that ensure these qualifications
- A file or portfolio on each member of the faculty that includes pertinent, up-to-date information describing the qualifications of the faculty member, such as curriculum vitae, teaching evaluations, and institutional qualification justifications in nonstandard situations.

**3.7.2. The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.**

Rationale and Notes:

Since the members of the faculty direct the learning enterprise of an academic institution and are responsible for assuring the quality of the academic program, it is imperative that an effective system of faculty evaluation be in place. The concept of faculty evaluation encompasses a range of processes designed to assess the quality and effectiveness of the performance of each member of the faculty. The overall evaluation system may include a variety of components, but regardless of the evaluation types utilized, it is critical that the faculty evaluation system be consistent with the mission of the institution.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies, procedures, and criteria that govern faculty evaluation and how are these publicized among the faculty and others?
- What is the procedure used in the evaluation of faculty?
- How does the institution ensure that faculty evaluation policies are sufficiently broad for all faculty, regardless of status?
- How are faculty evaluations administered and used in ensuring the effectiveness of the faculty, especially in terms of student learning?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and handbooks that describe the faculty evaluation process
- Sample evaluation forms and procedures
- Evidence that evaluations are taking place and being used

**3.7.3. The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.**

Rationale and Notes:

Faculty members are at the core of institutional teaching, learning, scholarship, and research and therefore need to stay current, improve their own skills, and have the opportunity to conduct research and scholarship. In order to establish and sustain a culture in which faculty professional development is valued and pervasive, it is important that institutions develop a systematic and comprehensive approach to offering and supporting activities and programs that assist and encourage members of the faculty to pursue professional development.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies, procedures, and programs dealing with the professional development of members of the faculty?
- How does the institution support faculty professional development?
- How are members of the faculty informed of professional development opportunities?
- How are professional development activities assessed?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and procedures governing faculty professional development
- Descriptions of the professional development opportunities supported by the institution and the resources allocated for professional development
- Evidence that members of the faculty are involved in professional development (e.g., reports, faculty files, rosters, grants, etc.)

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### **3.7.4. The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

The essential role of institutions of higher education is the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Academic freedom respects the dignity and rights of others while fostering intellectual freedom to teach, research, and publish. Responsible academic freedom enriches the contributions of higher education to society.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution define academic freedom?
- What are the institutional policies and procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom?
- How does the institution publicize its policies on academic freedom?
- If there have been any instances in which issues involving academic freedom have emerged, how have these issues been resolved?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Institutional statements and policies on academic freedom
- Publications describing academic freedom policies
- Any evidence regarding institutional academic freedom issues

### **3.7.5. The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Since faculty are generally responsible for ensuring the achievement of appropriate student learning and academic program outcomes, it is imperative that an institution establish policies that explicitly delineate the responsibilities and authority of its faculty in academic and governance matters. These published policies clarify the role of the faculty in relation to other constituencies regarding fundamental aspects of the institution.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies regarding the role of the faculty in academic and governance matters?
- What evidence exists that the policies are published and disseminated?

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Sample Documentation:

- Policies regarding the role of the faculty in academic and governance matters
- Publications describing these policies

**3.8.1 The institution provides facilities, services, and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.**

Rationale and Notes:

The mission of an institution requires a broad range of resources that relate to facilities, appropriate support services, and sufficient learning/information resources. The institution has an obligation to provide support for all aspects of an institution's mission relating to learning, services, and research.

**Note:** There is a distinction between CS 3.8.1 and CR 2.9. CS 3.8.1 requires *appropriate facilities, services, and learning/information resources* to support the institution's mission; CR 2.9 requires *adequate and sufficient library collections and other learning/information resources and access to those collections*.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How are the institution's facilities and services, or access to them, structured to meet the needs specific to the institution's programs, wherever they are offered?
- How is the provision of facilities, services, and learning/information resources related to the mission?
- How does the institution determine what are appropriate facilities, services, and learning/information resources?

Sample Documentation:

- Documents describing facilities, services, and learning/information resources and how they support programs and disciplines
- Mission statement of the library, learning resource center, or other similar support services
- Evaluations of educational programs needs and how the institution addresses facilities, services, and learning/information resources to address those needs
- Documentation of availability and access to services

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**3.8.2 The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.**

Rationale and Notes:

To ensure appropriate use of the library and other learning/information resources, the institution is expected to provide timely and effective access to the library/learning resources that enables students, faculty and staff to take full advantage of the learning resources provided by the institution.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the objective and the type of assistance available to learning/information resource users?
- What delivery mechanisms exist for instruction and assistance to library users and how are they assessed?
- How does the institution determine the effectiveness of its learning/information resource programs?

Sample Documentation:

- Documentation of the availability and type of instruction
- Documentation of the assessment of the instruction
- Reports of library instructional activity that demonstrate broad participation in the instructional program by all segments of the institution at all teaching locations

**3.8.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution.**

Rationale and Notes:

A sufficient number of qualified staff is measured by the effectiveness of the delivery of services to students, faculty, and staff rather than simply the number of staff employed. Qualified staff members are essential to carrying out the mission of the library. The emphasis is on overall qualifications rather than academic credentials and, that while academic credentials are primary and in most cases will be the standard qualification for library staff, other types of qualifications may prove to be appropriate.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution determine the qualifications of its library staff?
- How does the institution demonstrate that the staff is sufficient to accomplish the mission?
- What professional opportunities are available to the learning/information resources staff?

Sample Documentation:

- Roster of library/learning resource staff and documentation of their qualifications, along with position descriptions and any professional development support
- Surveys or any other documents addressing the effectiveness of services

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

Rationale and Notes:

Because students and student learning are central to the mission of the institution, institutions are obligated to develop comprehensive and appropriate policies delineating student rights and responsibilities. To be effective, such policies are clear and widely available to the entire community of the institution and include procedures for their implementation. The institution provides opportunities for students to learn about their rights and responsibilities.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies governing rights and responsibilities of students (both academic and nonacademic)?
- How do these rights conform to sound educational principles and practice and meet the needs of all the types of students served by the institution?
- What are ways in which the institution ensures that students as well as other constituencies of the institution are aware of student rights and responsibilities?
- What are the procedures for implementation of the policies on student rights and responsibilities?
- How are alleged violations and grievances regarding student rights and responsibilities handled?

Sample Documentation:

- Descriptions of student rights and responsibilities at the institution and the procedures used to implement the policies
- Documents describing the methods of dissemination of statements on student rights and responsibilities

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### **3.9.2 The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

The maintenance of the confidentiality of student records in secure locations is critical to the integrity of the institution. In order to meet this obligation, institutions develop and implement policies pertaining to student records. Campus constituencies need to understand the nature of student records and the policies that pertain to these records such as confidentiality, access, release, and security.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the definitions, policies, and procedures governing student records, their confidentiality and their release? How does the institution ensure that it adheres to these policies and procedures?
- How are the policies regarding student records in accordance with federal regulations and how do they follow educational best practices?
- How are students and others in the community informed of policies and procedures governing student records?
- What is the policy and process for the storage, release, dissemination, and disposition of student records (including both electronic and printed records)?

#### Sample Documentation:

- The policies and procedures governing student records, their security and confidentiality, their use, and their release

### **3.9.3 The institution provides services supporting its mission with qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs program.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Appropriate and effective student programs and services are central to student learning and development. In order to carry out such programs and services, the institution is expected to have student affairs professionals that have adequate educational training and experience to provide these services. Qualified staff members are essential to carrying out the mission of student services programs. The emphasis is on overall qualifications rather than academic credentials and, that while academic credentials are primary and in most cases will be the standard qualification, other types of qualifications may prove appropriate.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the various student support programs and services and how are they staffed?
- How are student affairs programs and services along with staff members evaluated?
- What are the training and professional growth opportunities for student affairs staff?

Sample Documentation:

- Student affairs organizational chart and list of support services
- Roster of student affairs staff and documentation of their qualifications along with position descriptions and any professional development support
- Relevant handbooks and manuals
- Assessments of student affairs programs and services including staff evaluation procedures and records
- Evidence that members of the student affairs staff have opportunities for professional growth and training and that they take advantage of them

**3.10.1 The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability.**

Rationale and Notes:

Financial stability is an essential component of an institution's ability to fulfill its mission and is meant to reflect more than a currently balanced budget. It generally refers to 3 to 5 years of financially stable conditions with a focus on such entities as revenue stream, expenses, and capital investments. An institution may be financially stable, with generally adequate financial and physical resources, and still experience fluctuations in its financial health, such as in funding, enrollment, or expenditures. If an institution experiences financial instability, it is important that it understands the causes and has a reasonable plan for remedying the situation.

**Note:** This Comprehensive Standard requests documentation of an institution's *past* capabilities in maintaining financial stability. CR 2.11 requests financial statements reflecting the institution's *current* financial status. CS 3.10.2 requires an institution to provide additional financial statements and related documents that appropriately and accurately represent the total operation of the institution and that provide assurance of continued *future* financial stability.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution manage depreciation?
- Has the institution experienced major changes in unrestricted revenues and expenditures over a period of time?

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- Are there special circumstances that explain any unusual financial conditions?
  - What is the institution's spending rate on endowment?
  - What are the administrative competencies of individuals hired to manage and sustain the institution's financial stability?
  - What are the institution's endowment management policies and how are they implemented?
  - How has the institution managed any changes in tuition revenues, state appropriations, or debt services?
  - What have been the changes in temporary and permanently unrestricted assets over the past three years?

Sample Documentation:

- Copies of the most recent 3-5 five years of audited financial statements
- Most recent 3-5 year schedule of changes in unrestricted net assets, excluding investment gains and losses; 3-5 year schedule of changes in total net assets; 3-5 year schedule of gifts and grants?
- Most recent 3-5 year history of enrollment, FTE and headcount
- Most recent 3-5 year history on endowment returns and annual payments or spending rates
- Most recent 3-5 year history on short-term and long-term debt
- Policies governing endowment management
- Most recent 3-5 years of fund-raising data

**3.10.2 The institution provides financial statements and related documents, including multiple measures for determining financial health as requested by the Commission, which accurately and appropriately represent the total operation of the institution.**

Rationale and Notes:

An institution's current audited financial statements as requested in CR 2.11 do not always accurately reflect an institution's capability to sustain its mission over a period of time. The Commission is interested in reviewing a battery of other financial statements and related documents that address the institution's capability beyond the one-year review period and that appropriately and accurately represent the total operation of the institution.

In addition, the Commission annually collects information from the submission of enrollment and financial institutional profiles that aid in the assessment of ongoing financial status of member and candidate institutions. The Commission needs to be able to rely on the accuracy and completeness of the data being presented and that the data represents a fair reflection of the financial conditions of the institutions. (See also the note under CS 3.10.1.)

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Has the institution completed and submitted its most recent institutional profile for financial information as requested by the Commission?
- Has the institution completed and submitted its most recent institutional profile for general and enrollment information as requested by the Commission?
- What other financial information has the Commission requested, if any?
- What financial statements and related documents can be presented to demonstrate the institution's capability to sustain its financial status in the future?
- How do the documents provided by the institution accurately and appropriately represent the total operation of the institution?

Sample Documentation:

- The institution's completed most recent institutional profile for financial information
- The institution's completed most recent institutional profile for general and enrollment information
- The written institutional response to any Commission request for information, if applicable

**3.10.3 The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations.**

Rationale and Notes:

Financial aid programs often have an important and significant impact on the finances of an institution. Many institutions and their students are highly dependent on federal and state funds, thus continued compliance with regulations is critical to long-term financial health. Institutional integrity dictates that if governmental funds are accepted, governmental regulations will be followed. A full program of audit using the OMB A-133 audit procedure is necessary to determine the accountability and integrity of an institution's financial aid program.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- For public institutions: Did the institution receive an unqualified opinion in the auditor's report on compliance and on internal control over financial reporting based on an audit of financial statements performed in accordance with governmental auditing standards? Have there been findings? If so, have they been resolved? Are findings repeated and unclear?
- For private institutions: Did the institution receive an unqualified opinion in the independent auditor's report on compliance with requirements applicable to each

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major program and internal control over compliance with OMB Circular A-133? Have there been findings? If so, have they been resolved? Are findings repeated and unclear?

- Is the institution on electronic transfer or has it been placed on direct reimbursement method for federal funds?
- Has the institution been obligated to post a letter of credit on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education or other financial regulatory agencies?

Sample Documentation:

- Audits of financial aid programs for the past 3 years
- Institutional responses to all audits and/or findings
- Copies of all correspondence received from the U.S. Department of Education for the past 3 years

**3.10.4 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial and physical resources.**

Rationale and Notes:

Resource management, both financial and physical, is critical to the long-term stability of an institution. The institution has a fiduciary responsibility to operate in a prudent and responsible manner. This responsibility extends to the care for its financial and physical assets by obtaining, sustaining, and maintaining them for achieving its mission. This requires the institution to employ qualified staff empowered to provide systems and procedures for adequate checks, balances, and control over assets.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Does the institution have accurate and up-to-date records of its physical inventory?
- What written policies and procedures are available for safeguarding cash? For the management of and distributions from endowment funds? For approval of expenditures?
- How does the institution manage deferred maintenance?
- How does the institution manage risk as it relates to financial and physical resources?

Sample Documentation:

- Internal audit and risk management reports
- Documentation of regular physical inventories
- Evidence of qualifications and job descriptions of the institution's fiscal officer and business office staff

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- Institutional policies related to internal controls/audit
  - Institutional policies related to purchasing, including methods for recording, tracking, and disposal of assets
  - Investment policy
  - Documentation of budget reporting to appropriate constituencies, including members of the board

### **3.10.5 The institution maintains financial control over externally funded or sponsored research and programs.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

Externally funded research and programs are designed to aid in fulfillment of the institution's mission. Ceding financial controls to the funding source may compromise financial, ethical, or management standards of the institution. The same prudence in financial control should prevail as in internally funded activities.

#### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies governing the expenditures of external funds? Are they published?
- Are the institution's externally funded or sponsored research programs accounted for in an appropriate manner consistent with the institution's financial policies and procedures?
- Are appropriate reports filed in a timely manner as required by external source of funds?
- Who has management control over external program and research funds within the institution and how are they qualified?

#### Sample Documentation:

- Grant policies and procedures governing externally funded programs
- Indirect cost policy
- Federal audits and management letters
- Grants accounting documentation

### **3.10.6 The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community.**

#### Rationale and Notes:

An institution has an ethical responsibility to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all campus constituents. A healthy, safe, and secure environment enhances

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the accomplishment of the institution's mission and contributes to more effective risk management.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What is the institution's safety plan?
- Who has campus administrative responsibility for health, safety, and security functions?
- Are facilities and grounds regularly reviewed and/or tested for health and safety concerns?
- How does the institution ensure campus security?

Sample Documentation:

- Evidence that the institution has qualified staff to carry out the safety, security, and health plans of the institutions
- Current safety, emergency, and disaster plans
- Emergency procedures
- Health inspection reports
- Evidence of evacuation plans
- Evidence of compliance with environmental and occupational regulations

**3.10.7 The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that are adequate to serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities.**

Rationale and Notes:

Within the mission and purpose of the institution is the need to operate and maintain physical facilities adequate to serve the educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities. Adequate, well-maintained facilities for all programs enable an institution to achieve its educational goals and to more effectively serve its constituents.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Is there a master facility plan in place designed to meet current and future needs of the institution? How is it revised and updated?
- What is the institution's plan for routine and preventative maintenance?
- What is the institution's deferred maintenance plan?
- How do the physical facilities support the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities?
- How does the institution provide adequate physical facilities at off-campus sites?

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Sample Documentation:

- Plan for routine, preventative, and deferred maintenance
- Facilities satisfaction survey results
- Most recent 3- to 5-year annual capital budget
- Evidence that the institution has facilities that adequately support the mission of the institution
- A video or other visual means to provide a “walking tour” of all the institution’s facilities
- Facilities master plan including a campus map

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## SECTION 4

# FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

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- 4.1 When evaluating success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution’s mission, the institution includes, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.**

Rationale and Notes:

An institution needs to be able to document in all educational programs its success with respect to student achievement. In doing so, it may use a broad range of indicators to include, as appropriate, course completion rates, state licensing examinations, job placement rates, or other means relevant to the institution’s mission.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How does the institution document student success in relation to its mission and its educational programs?
- Are the three indicators mentioned above appropriate to the mission of the institution? If so, how does the institution use the findings?

Sample Documentation:

- Sample documentation of student achievement such as trend data showing course completion by discipline, pass rates on state licensing exams, job placement rates by degree program, and others

- 4.2 The institution maintains a curriculum that is directly related and appropriate to its purpose and goals and to diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded.**

Rationale and Notes:

To meet its mission, an institution offers educational programs that are appropriate to the type of diplomas, certificates, and degrees awarded. The institution’s curriculum carries out the goals of the educational programs.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- How are existing programs an outgrowth of the mission and goals of the institution?
- What evidence exists that the programs are appropriate to diplomas, certificates, and degrees awarded by the institution?
- What evidence exists that the curriculum is appropriate to the programs?

Sample Documentation:

- Description of the mission of the institution and how the curricula are related to that mission
- Documentation that the curricula are consistent with the diplomas, certificates, and degrees awarded by the institution and consistent with good practices in higher education

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

Rationale and Notes:

Good educational practice suggests that the institution's constituents be informed about matters such as academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. Such policies and calendars are widely distributed.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

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

Sample Documentation:

- Publications and Web pages including information about academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies

**4.4 The institution demonstrates that program length is appropriate for each of the degrees offered.**

Rationale and Notes:

Accepted practices in higher education are used to determine program length and completion requirements. The faculty determine scope and length based upon the degree being pursued. Degree programs are of sufficient length to include appropriate course work, of sufficient duration to provide for mastery of all aspects of the subject matter.

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Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What criteria does the institution use to determine the appropriateness of program length?
- How is the program length sufficient for students to gain mastery of the subject matter?

Sample Documentation:

- Documentation of the criteria used in determining program length
- Documents identifying program length (e.g., catalogs, curriculum approval policies, approved curriculum, minutes of curriculum committees, program brochures, program review reports, academic policy manual, degree planning worksheets)

**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 also the Commission’s policy “Complaint Procedures for the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.”)**

Rationale and Notes:

Student complaints need to be addressed in a fair and professional manner, and the policies and procedures governing student complaints need to be well publicized and provide clear and consistent guidelines for resolution.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What are the policies and procedures governing student complaints?
- How are the policies and procedures governing student complaints disseminated?
- What is the evidence that the publicized policies and procedures are followed when resolving student complaints?

Sample Documentation:

- Policies and procedures for addressing student complaints
- Evidence that the published policies and procedures are followed when resolving student complaints

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#### 4.6 **Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies.**

##### Rationale and Notes:

Institutional integrity requires that recruitment materials and presentations be accurate.

**Note:** For further guidance regarding appropriate institutional advertising and public presentations, see the Commission's "Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status: Guidelines" available at [www.sacs.org](http://www.sacs.org).

##### Relevant Questions for Consideration:

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

##### Sample Documentation:

- Publicized recruitment materials found in institutional advertisements, brochures, catalogs, Web sites, etc.
- Documents such as lists of course offerings, schedules, etc., if relevant

#### 4.7 **The institution publishes the name of its primary accreditor and its address and phone number. (The publication of this information is presented so that it is clear that inquiries to the Commission should relate only to the accreditation status of the institution, and not to general admission information.)**

##### Rationale and Notes:

This federal requirement promotes the role of the regional accrediting agency in protecting the general public from fraudulent practices by institutions and in ensuring that accredited institutions meet certain basic quality standards. Among other things, providing this information makes it possible for anyone to inquire about the accreditation status of the institution, to ask questions about the accreditation process, or to pursue procedures for filing complaints against an institution. The information should be clearly stated so that the constituent understands that the statement is published exclusively for accreditation related purposes and not to inquire regarding the admissions or general educational policies and practices of an institution. For this information, the individual should be referred to the institution's catalog.

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Typically the required information is published in institutional catalogs and other publicity instruments. The correct information is: Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097, telephone 404-679-4500, Web site: [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- Where and how does the institution publish the required information?
- Is the information accurate and consistent everywhere it is published, both in print and in electronic format?

Sample Documentation:

- Example of a document in which the information is published, both print and electronic

**4.8 The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the 1998 Higher Education Amendments. (In reviewing the institution's compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on documentation forwarded to it by the U.S. Secretary of Education.)**

Rationale and Notes:

Many institutions are dependent upon the availability of Title IV financial aid to assist students with their educational expenses and maintain adequate levels of enrollment. In order to secure these funds, an institution complies with the program responsibilities under Title IV of the 1998 Higher Education Act or risks the loss of federal aid for both its students and other organizational needs.

As the primary gatekeeper for many of its member and candidate institutions seeking Title IV funds, the Commission is obligated to review any information submitted by the institution or provided by the U.S. Department of Education that could affect an institution's continued compliance with Commission standards. Under this standard, institutions are required to submit to the Commission any communication from the U.S. Department of Education related to continued compliance with Title IV provisions.

Relevant Questions for Consideration:

- What issues exist with Title IV programs for the institution, if any?
- Has the institution been placed on the reimbursement method?
- Has the institution been required to obtain a letter of credit in favor of the Department of Education?
- Have complaints been filed with the Department of Education regarding the institution?

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- Do the independent audits of the institution's financial aid programs evidence significant noncompliance?
  - Are there significant impending litigation issues with respect to financial aid activities?
  - Are there significant unpaid dollar amounts due back to the U.S. Department of Education?
  - Has adverse communication been received from the Department of Education? If so, what was the institution's response?
  - What is the institution's student loan default rate?
  - Is the institution aware of infractions to regulations which would jeopardize Title IV funding?

Sample Documentation:

- Copies of all recent, relevant correspondence from the U.S. Department of Education
- Copies of institutional responses to U.S. Department of Education correspondence
- Negotiated settlement agreements for the payoff of any fines or monies owed in connection with program or fiscal audits
- Copies of any reports on compliance from the U.S. Department of Education