

SECTION 7: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

7.1

The institution engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission.

(Institutional planning) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

Effective institutions demonstrate a commitment to principles of continuous improvements, based on a systematic and documented process of assessing institutional performance with respect to mission in all aspects of the institution. An institutional planning and effectiveness process involves all programs, services, and constituencies; is linked to the decision-making process at all levels; and provides a sound basis for budgetary decisions and resource allocations.

Institutions with missions that expand beyond teaching into research and public/community service set strategic expectations in all these areas.

The purpose of this Core Requirement is to assure that the institution has an appropriate broad-based approach to institution-wide effectiveness that supports its mission and serves as a framework for planning. This is followed by evaluation activities that allow the institution to discern whether it is making the progress it had anticipated in its planning efforts, and making corrections as needed. Unlike other standards that relate to assessing outcomes on a more “micro” unit-by-unit basis (see Standard 8.2 of this document), this standard emphasizes the more “macro” aspects of planning and evaluation. The two are, of course, related and should certainly not be inconsistent with each other.

These “macro” planning and evaluation activities often entail a longer time horizon than unit planning. The activities of the institution’s planning and evaluation system may be scheduled at periodic intervals that make sense for the institution and its mission.

Institutional narratives—and reviewer expectations—often involve parsing the words of this standard carefully. For example, note there are two sets of processes required: planning *and* evaluation. Also, establishing compliance with the adjectives in the standard is generally made explicit: ongoing, comprehensive, integrated, research-based, and systematic. Each word is important and deserves attention. While the standard does not require a formal strategic plan or similarly named document, the expectations of the standard closely parallel that type of process. The key is that the institution can show its processes are undertaken seriously, with a focus on institutional improvement.

Questions to Consider

- Are there both planning and evaluation processes at the institutional level?
- Is the process ongoing, and not something initiated to get through the accreditation review?

- In what sense are the processes comprehensive? Is this more than academic planning? More than enrollment planning? More than financial planning? More than facilities planning?
- For institutions with missions that are broader than classroom instruction, how are goals and expected outcomes set for research, public/community service, or other aspects of the mission?
- How are the processes themselves integrated? Does evaluation arise from planning expectations? Does evaluation feed back into changes in institutional plans?
- How is the comprehensive “macro” planning effort integrated with “micro” unit-level planning and evaluation? How does it inform resource allocation decisions?
- In what sense are these processes research based? What types of data are collected and analyzed?
- Are plans and evaluations of results mission consistent?
- What evidence exists that the institution-wide planning and evaluation processes result in continuing improvements in institutional quality?
- Is there appropriate institutional research and budgetary support for assessment programs throughout the institution?
- Are appropriate internal and external constituents and stakeholders involved in the planning and evaluation process?

Sample Documentation

- Descriptions of the institutional planning and evaluation processes, including a timetable.
- Documents related to the most recent applications of these processes (e.g., formal comprehensive plans, periodic updates).
- Specific examples of how institutional research has led to continuing improvement or otherwise affected the institution.
- Specific examples to document adherence to the adjectives: ongoing, comprehensive, integrated, research-based, systematic.
- Minutes from board meetings, cabinet meetings, ad hoc committees and task forces (or other similar documents) that show that planning and evaluation are taken seriously and that there is broad involvement.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

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| Standard 7.2 | <i>(Quality Enhancement Plan)</i> |
| Standard 7.3 | <i>(Administrative effectiveness)</i> |
| CR 8.1 | <i>(Student achievement)</i> |

- Standard 8.2.a (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)
Standard 8.2.b (*Student outcomes: general education*)
Standard 8.2.c (*Student outcomes: academic and student services*)

7.2

The institution has a Quality Enhancement Plan that (a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes; (b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies; (c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success; (d) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and (e) includes a plan to assess achievement.
(Quality Enhancement Plan)

Rationale and Notes

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is an integral component of the reaffirmation of accreditation process and is derived from an institution's ongoing comprehensive planning and evaluation processes. It reflects and affirms a commitment to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue the institution considers important to improving student learning outcomes and/or student success.

By providing details on a specific component or subcomponent for the comprehensive planning and evaluation process, the institution can delve into more detail than would appear in Standard 7.1 (Institutional planning) on a topic the institution itself has identified as a priority. As an ongoing process, the QEP will be reviewed by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, allowing a peer review committee to better understand the institution's focus on student learning and/or student success. In addition, it will allow the institution to benefit from the insights of the committee to strengthen its efforts as it moves forward. It is important to note that the topic of the QEP may be something that is already underway, or it may represent a new initiative; the focus of the QEP will depend heavily on where the institution is relative to its own comprehensive planning and evaluation process. Put another way, there is not an expectation that an institution will "stop what it is doing" until it finds out the result of the reaffirmation review. In fact, to do so would represent a weakness in the ongoing planning and evaluation process already in place. Instead, the QEP is done in the spirit of an institution seeking continuous improvement.

Because the QEP is more detailed than other elements of the reaffirmation process, it should be a standalone document, not a narrative within the Compliance Certification. That document should address each of the specific components within the standard. Comments on each of those components follow.

A topic identified through...ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes

The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses an identified element from within the institution's comprehensive planning process that focuses