

## **Selected Comments on Evidence/Analysis for the Criteria March 2008**

While, overall, institutional self-studies are taking a more evaluative approach, Commission staff and team chairs have noticed a number of areas where evidence often has been weak or less than responsive to the core components. This document does not cover every core component; neither does it attempt to be exhaustive within the core components it does cover. Rather, our aim here is to highlight some common points of difficulty and to suggest (not dictate) ways to meet the expectations. Please keep in mind that this discussion focuses on addressing the Criteria and the core components within them, but it does not assume that self-studies must be organized in that order. Also, the inclusion here of certain points for a given core component does not mean that other points are less vital - rather that these points have been more often overlooked or not fully addressed. There is also an attempt to identify other core components that be related in evaluating such evidence, though the level of relation will vary with the individual institution.

**Criterion One: Mission and Integrity.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

### Core Component 1a:

Institutions understand that their mission statement should be clear and provide a succinct representation of their purpose for existence. Common language found in these statements includes ways to communicate socially meaningful and measurable criteria that address concepts such as the moral/ethical position, public image, market, products/services, the geographic domain, and expectations. In essence, mission statements provide an indication of character and manner and are intended for the internal community as well as external constituencies.

In order to reach out to both internal and external communities, there is an expectation that the mission statement is displayed and/or distributed widely. Institutions have commonly displayed their mission statements on their web site and through course catalogs; student, faculty, and employee handbooks; recruitment materials; wall plaques; and business cards. Mission statements are adopted by the board and need to be reviewed periodically and refreshed as the mission changes. However, C-Es have discovered adoption problems when the new mission statement is published and the old mission statement remains in circulation.

Further, institutions can incur problems when questions arise over the use of capacity/resources in relation to the mission. For example, a mission statement might contain a geographical limitation such as 'serving the educational needs of the northwest USA.' Despite the geographical limitation, the administration approved the use of resources to support a significant recruitment effort of international students to bolster its enrollment. The situation may create additional difficulties if the institution finds itself unprepared for this large influx of international students and, as a consequence, learning suffers.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1d, 1e, 2b, 2d, 3b, and 3d.

### Core Component 1b:

Through mission statements institutions show their commitment to diversity by reflecting the communities in which they live and provide services. In doing so, they address their willingness and desire to foster an environment that enables and encourages diversity. For example, at Siena Heights our mission statement reads ‘. . . to assist people to become more competent, purposeful, and ethical through a teaching and learning environment which respects the dignity of all.’

Examples of activities that institutions use to support diversity include sponsoring multicultural events such as a lecture series, maintaining a code or regulation that addresses expected behavior, promoting cultural studies, and having a representative workforce. My experience has also taught me that increased diversity tends to improve morale, attract more talented individuals, and provide unity.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 2d, 3c, 4c, and 5b.

### Core Components 1c:

Ensuring that a campus community understands and supports the institution’s mission is important. Support for the mission acknowledges an appreciation for the vision, values, goals, and organizational priorities. It ensures priorities and decisions to be mission-driven and that the goals of divisions and departments fit within the mission. As well, planning efforts and budget allocations are organized around and provide consistency with the mission.

Consider again the example where the institution is drifting outside its mission of ‘serving the educational needs of NW USA.’ The institution made it a priority to recruit outside of its mission-driven service area to correct its sagging enrollment. To accomplish the new recruitment goal, the administration focused resources on this new market of students. As a result, the goal and priority setting did not align well or fit the mission.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 2d and 5d.

### Core Component 1d:

Governance structures are often highly complex due to the reliance upon persuasion and shared interests to create conditions for the right decisions to happen. Institutions require talented and effective leaders. To ensure commitment to the mission, institutions need board members, administrators, and faculty and staff who are capable of carrying out their defined responsibilities.

Some suggested considerations are to review the size of their upper administration in relation to the number of faculty and/or students and to assess periodically the various layers of management needed to minimize duplication and limit delays involved in the governance.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 2d, 3b, and 3d.

### Core Component 1e:

Clearly, an institution demonstrates its integrity by adhering to its principles and professional standards. However, there may be an occasion when an institution compromises its integrity. Examples to consider include the use of forums that identify, affirm, and promote the values of academic integrity among students, faculty, and administrators. Other ways of ensuring integrity are clarifying expectations for students and developing fair and relevant assessment tools.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1d, 2c, and 3a.

**Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

#### Core Component 2a:

The idea of preparing for a future that is shaped by societal and economic trends is asking institutions to consider a very challenging question. The inquiry provides institutions with an opportunity to identify how they manage the tension that often occurs between its pursuit of mission and its preservation of institutional and financial viability. Have you ever noticed what materials are needed and reviewed for an institution to position itself for the future? Most would agree that, at a minimum, the leadership must have in its possession pertinent quantifiable data along with an inventory of trends that provide a host of perspectives relative to the institution's current environment and support for its desired future direction.

A particular issue of focus for C-Es is when an institution's direction begins to reach or stretch beyond its boundaries of mission without ample study by the administration or sufficient understanding by the board. For example, an institution going beyond its mission may be triggered by strategies used to admit new students motivated to improve low enrollments or by investing in programs that have cross-purposes and assumed to enhance position or even prestige.

When these conditions exist, tensions may be created and added pressure exerted on the day-to-day operations and demand for increased funding. The result is that rather than achieving rewards and positive returns for its effort, an imbalance occurs between the mission and the use of capacity/resources for other purposes. This newly created interaction may cause results to come up short and, in turn, give rise for concern in achieving planned outcomes and positive returns as well as present new worries for financial health.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1a, 1d, 1e, 2b, 2d, and 3d.

#### Core Component 2b

This component seeks to determine whether the institution has sufficiently assessed its desire for change including use of its available resource base. The contemplation of change may come from the need for continuous improvements to in day-to-day operations. Or, the institution may desire future changes that may include additional investment of current resources into such activities as new delivery systems, moving to higher degree levels, or establishing new

instructional sites. Institutions need to convey a concise understanding of their planning processes as well as provide evidence that planning processes emphasize realistic and sufficient assessment processes.

The proposition is that C-Es will begin by seeking to understand how key factors interact to sustain institutional health over time. Again, consider the model built in core component 2a of the relational aspect of institutional mission to capacity/resources. While it may seem that one may dominate the other, my suggestion is that in a healthy organization these factors maintain an appropriate balance through adequate planning and proper monitoring of results. For example, an institution whose leadership anticipates the need for overall growth in new programs may also believe that the growth will require renovations or an expansion of property, plant, and equipment. The investment looks great on paper, expanding the institution's unrestricted net assets. However, the growth in new programs and the physical plant (unrestricted net assets) will require that cash be maintained in balance with or exceed the operating capacities of the new programs and the requirements of the plant expansion. Otherwise, operations will suffer including the new programs and, ultimately, student learning may be negatively impacted.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1a, 1d, 3b, and 3d.

#### Core Component 2c:

Growth and change build upon institutional momentum. With this core component, institutions have an opportunity to demonstrate how they administer ongoing assessments and evaluations of their mission and programs delivered to its various communities. The administration must clearly demonstrate that it maintains dependable and ongoing systems capable of generating consistent and accurate data for ongoing self-evaluation. Both anticipated and unanticipated results are equally viewed. If such evidence does not exist, it is likely that an institution will struggle in its interpretations. Therefore, C-Es will want to understand the administration's reliance upon data and the interaction of decision making processes as well as the direction taken should results be lagging.

This is another opportunity to look at this relationship of mission to capacity/resources. The leadership identifies how funds will be secured (i.e., operations, debt) and spent. The planning processes should include an explanation for identifying priorities along with assumptions for revenue and costs and outcomes. C-Es want to know whether the right mix of capacity/resources was made available as well as whether the goals were attained as intended and was there a proper response to the results achieved.

Why this core component becomes so important to C-Es is that there is not always a clear link between programs' benchmarks and the resources used (i.e., physical, financial, human) and the outcomes achieved. What is the diagnosis—program success and further fulfillment of the mission or a miserable failure? It is incumbent upon the administration to provide accountability by providing evidence of ongoing assessment processes and responding to those results intelligently.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1c, 1d, 3a, and 5c.

#### Core Component 2d:

Most institutions understand that planning must be doable as well as aligned effectively to its mission. If the planning processes are not well-grounded to the mission, an institution could possibly begin to drift away from its mission and develop what is known as *mission creep*. Here, resources are reallocated and core programs may begin to receive less than the required support for continuous improvements or investment in mission-related areas. The importance of planning alignment assures that planning efforts maintain an appropriate interaction between mission and capacity/resources.

There are fundamental ways for how an institution to provide evidence that its planning processes are properly aligned. Some thoughts to consider are that C-Es will look for evidence that may include: drawing a distinction between short- and long-term plans; distinguishing operational planning from strategic planning; taking steps to link planning to budgeting; ensuring human, financial and physical resources are linked to priorities; and checking the vital signs of current conditions and evaluating future direction.

Examples where this component may have further implications are on core components 1d, 2b, 2c, 3d, 4d, and 5c.

**Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

#### Core Component 3a:

1. Nearly all organizations understand that much of the discussion of assessment belongs with this core component. However, some organizations fail to address the expectation that all programs (including general education) have measurable and appropriate objectives. While it is generally not feasible to put all such objectives in the self-study directly, there needs to be both some representative examples in the self-study and an indication of where the others can be found either in the resource room or in an appendix.
2. A particular issue with the appropriateness (for degree level) of the objectives is how the organization determined that they are appropriate - advisory group, professional standards, etc. There is also sometimes a failure to show that the instruments being used for assessment actually measure progress against the stated objectives.
3. The participation of faculty in the oversight of curriculum and assessment should be demonstrated. Such demonstration might be addressed in a faculty survey. There may also be implications for Core Component 1d.
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#### Core Component 3b:

1. Some institutions focus here so much on describing encouragement for excellence in teaching (such as in personnel policies and in awards for teaching) that they miss both students' view of the quality of instruction and the level of faculty credentials. In both cases, some analysis over time is generally useful as is comparisons with other institutions.
2. A breakdown in credentials among major units and/or by undergraduate and graduate faculty (where applicable) may also be called for. Another frequently important consideration is the balance between full- and part-time faculty and their respective credentials. This may have connections with Core Component 2b. For example, if an institution teaches too many low-enrollment upper division courses, it may find itself relying excessively on adjuncts for freshman or general education courses. Adjuncts working in the fields in which they teach frequently provide practical expertise that is critical to proper student preparation, but excessive reliance on adjuncts may deprive the institution of needed programmatic continuity, consistency, and academic oversight (as expected in Core Component 3a).
3. Professional development of faculty needs an analytical treatment, not primarily a description of what's available for trips, conferences, sabbaticals, and summer grants. What is the level of faculty participation? Do the faculty feel that it has been useful. What kind of accountability is there for released time, and how does it affect the use of adjuncts or overloads?

#### Core Component 3c:

1. This is the key core component for discussion of student success in retention and persistence, though such discussion often lacks support in quantitative data. Some notion of whether such indicators are improving over time is generally important as is some sense of whether they are at acceptable levels. Comparisons with peer institutions may be warranted. Institutions may also need to examine sub-populations to see whether, for example, there is an issue with the success of provisionally accepted students. Core Component 2b has a clear linkage, as does 2c.
2. Some institutions also fail to report on student satisfaction in key support areas such as advising. A related matter is the success of students in first credit bearing courses as it reflects on the efficacy of placement and on the efficacy of remedial coursework. If there seems to be excess attrition because of insufficient support staffing, how has this been addressed in budgeting? Core Component 2d may also be affected.

**Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge.** The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

#### Core Component 4a:

1. While most organizations recognize the importance of faculty development, many do not deal adequately with staff development. Some items to look at beyond a description of the development programs and policies (e.g., tuition discounts), are the level of funding for staff development and the proportion of full-time staff who have participated in formal development activities during some recent period of time. It may also be useful to know how the staff views development opportunities.
2. For those institutions involved with sponsored activity, the self-study might evaluate the level of such activity including changes over time and the standing relative to other peer institutions. There might also be examination of policies, technology, and facilities to support such activity. This may lead in turn to connections with Core Components 3d and 2b.

#### Core Component 4b:

1. For organizations with undergraduate programs, this is the key core component in which to report and analyze actual results (as opposed to objectives and instruments, which are in Core Component 3a) for general education outcomes. Many self-studies are thin in this area, consigning such results and analyses (if they exist) to the resource room, where they may be buried in lengthy documents and hard to find. Out of concerns over length and readability of the self-study, most such results and analyses would not go in the narrative directly, but there should be some representative examples, along with a clear indication of where the remaining ones can be found. Most self-studies do recognize the need to exhibit a feedback loop, so examples of interventions taken in response to assessment results are generally (and properly) included. However, the analyses underlying those interventions are often absent, leaving the team uncertain as to the connection with assessment.
2. This core component also provides the place for an intellectual examination of general education requirements and practices. Do the course requirements in general education actually serve the stated purposes? How does the institution insure such service? As in the above item, surveys of students and/or alumni may be useful here.

#### Core Component 4c:

1. This core component, in contrast to the previous core component, is focused on major fields. However, the same observations as in Item 1 in Core Component 4b apply here as well in relation to results, analyses, and interventions. In finding a fair representation of major fields, it may be helpful to look at different levels and across various colleges in the institution. How are the analyses of assessment integrated into periodic program review?
2. Here is a place the institution may want to look at experiential learning. How pervasive is experiential learning, and how well are its aims being served?
3. In addition, organizations often fail to provide quantitative data and analyses for (as relevant) job placement or placement in more advanced educational programs. These evaluations may need to be disaggregated in relation to various colleges in the institution

or looked at over time. Does the institution provide adequate support for its graduating students in finding jobs? What do graduates think?

**Criterion Five: Engagement and Service.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Core Component 5a:

Self-studies often do not distinguish very well between this core component and Core Component 5b. While the response to 5b properly describes the organization's service activities and the resources put into them, this core component should include the organization's *analysis* of its capacity to serve the needs and expectations. That analysis is not provided by a list of activities and resources. What is needed are things like reports on advisory groups and other mechanisms to gather information about expectations and needed services and about processes that take such information and get it into the planning process. This also relates to Core Component 2a.

Core Component 5b:

Does the institution take systematic account of the cost of service activities and budget/staff for them accordingly or does it provide resources for them on an ad hoc basis? Are there fees set for some services that are intended to make them self-sufficient? How well does this work? Are there unintended subsidies? Has the institution worked out arrangements, such as articulation agreements and service learning agreements, to partner effectively with other institutions? Core Components 2b and 4c may be linked.

Core Component 5d:

The problem with this core component is how to demonstrate that the organization's services are actually valued. In some cases, there may be actual user evaluations, some of which could be summarized and reported in the narrative. In other cases, it may be impractical to get evaluations (say, at events open to the public), but the level of attendance/participation may be quantifiable. Another avenue in special circumstances may involve individual letters from persons who are in a position to represent a certain class of users. For example, a school district superintendent might write a letter about the value of in-service activities provided by the organization to teachers in the district.