

CHEA

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES: THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT*

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Background

Student achievement in higher education is a major national and international interest and concern. The academic and accreditation communities, the federal government, state governments and employers in the United States as well as organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have all identified major gains in student achievement as essential to the future of nations, the well-being of societies and the world economy.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has focused on the role of accreditation in student achievement since the publication of its 2001 [*Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure*](#). Student achievement has remained central to CHEA research and policy analysis, as well as interviews and surveys with member institutions, conferences and meetings, and the [*CHEA Award for Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes*](#). CHEA, in addition to its own activities, has been part of many national and international conversations, working with colleagues to identify solutions and build consensus about moving forward with student achievement.

This advisory statement identifies valuable practices associated with the role of accreditation in addressing student achievement. "Student achievement" refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities that a student has attained as a result of engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences. CHEA developed an initial draft of this statement in Fall 2009 and circulated it among the 3,000 CHEA institutional members, accrediting organizations and higher education associations to obtain comments and suggestions.

Accreditation and Student Achievement

Institutional and programmatic accreditation are central to undertakings to address student achievement in higher education. Accreditation is part of aligning the academic community's longstanding commitment to robust self-regulation and peer/professional review of higher education quality with the challenge of accountability to the public for student achievement.

The federal government, in its oversight role of accrediting organizations (federal "recognition"), expects that accreditation will address student achievement. CHEA scrutiny of accrediting organizations (also known as "recognition") reflects an expectation that accreditation reviews focus on student achievement as fundamental to judgment about academic quality. State emphasis on performance funding includes considerable attention to student achievement, with some states relying on accreditation for this purpose. The private sector (e.g., employers or foundations) expects accredited status to signal confidence in the work of an institution or program as this relates to what students learn.

*This discussion of effective practices is not part of the CHEA Recognition Policy and Procedures standards for CHEA recognition.

Effective Practices

As accreditation plays a vital role in addressing student achievement, the following practices emerge as especially effective in driving this important work. These practices are reflected in the activities of many accrediting organizations that are successful in their efforts with student achievement, institutions and programs. This does not mean that all accreditors employ all practices.

1. (*Partnership*) Accrediting organizations work with college and university academic leaders in establishing goals for student achievement, collecting evidence and making judgments about effectiveness in achieving these goals.
2. (*Clear Accreditation Standards and Policies*) Accreditation standards and policies provide clear expectations about student achievement. Such standards and policies help organize the work of colleges and universities in addressing student achievement in the context of their respective missions.
3. (*Peer/Professional Review*) Accreditation's peer/professional review provides valuable collegial advice and guidance as institutions and programs address student achievement and quality improvement.
4. (*Faculty Participation*) Accrediting organizations work to broaden and intensify faculty participation in accreditation review, benefiting from their expertise in deciding and judging goals and evidence for student achievement.
5. (*Public Accountability and Informing the Public*) Accrediting organizations as well as institutions and programs provide the public with easily accessible, understandable information about success with student achievement.
6. (*Engagement in National Initiatives*) Accrediting organizations acknowledge, as they deem appropriate in the context of accreditation review, the results of institutional and programmatic participation in national initiatives focused on student achievement that have emerged in the past dozen years. These include, e.g., the Essential Outcomes of AAC&U, U-CAN, VSA, CLA, NSSE – aiding institutional leadership in moving forward.**
7. (*Student Attainment*) Accrediting organizations, working with institutions and programs, focus attention on quality as part of institutional, state and national efforts to increase the number of students who complete educational goals, including degree attainment.
8. (*Commitment to Self-Examination*) Accrediting organizations, working with institutions and programs, sustain an ongoing review of standards and policies as part of assuring appropriate rigor in expectations of student achievement.

For more information on student achievement, see the following CHEA publications: [Accreditation and Accountability: A CHEA Special Report \(pdf\)](#) December 2006; [Is Accreditation Accountable? The Continuing Conversation Between Accreditation and the Federal Government \(pdf\)](#) October 2003; [Statement of Mutual Responsibilities for Student Learning Outcomes: Accreditation, Institutions and Programs \(pdf\)](#) September 2003; and [The CHEA Chronicle: Student Learning Outcomes Workshop \(pdf\)](#) Vol. 5, No. 2, May 2002. See also [New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability \(pdf\)](#) January 30, 2008.

**The *Essential Outcomes* of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities' *University-College Accountability Network*, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities' *Voluntary System of Accountability*, the Council for Aid to Education's *Collegiate Learning Assessment* and the *National Survey of Student Engagement*.

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