

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

on continuous improvement regarding student learning outcomes and/or student success. The QEP should not be considered as something to be “bolted on” the planning process, but instead something that arises from that process. If no element of the institutional plan (or other comprehensive, strategic planning document) at the institution addresses these topics, there may be a concern under Standard 7.1 (*Institutional planning*) regarding the comprehensiveness of the institution’s planning process in evaluating its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.

Broad-based support of institutional constituencies

Generally this element of the QEP can be established by demonstrating that the comprehensive planning and evaluation process itself has this element. In any event, the chosen QEP topic should have this characteristic. Since most comprehensive planning and evaluation processes will have multiple potential QEP topics embedded within the strategic plan, the decision to “pick one” should have broad support of appropriate constituencies. Similarly, the institution should demonstrate that this broad involvement also is being carried over into the implementation strategies as the QEP proceeds.

Focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success

Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP as enhancing student knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values. Student success is also defined broadly as improvements in key student outcomes such as student retention, completion, time-to-degree, placement in field, or performance in “gatekeeper” courses. While the potential topics cover a very broad range of options, the chosen QEP should be specific as to what its goals are, and why those goals are important to the institutional mission.

Commits resources to initiate, implement and complete the QEP

Resources should be interpreted more broadly than just direct monetary expenditures. There is no obligation for a specific, advance monetary commitment for the QEP. Instead, the QEP should identify the realistic resources, including personnel, needed for successful implementation and should explain how the institution will marshal these resources. Depending on whether the QEP project is a new initiative, this may be both forward and backward looking, and the case for a commitment of resources may build upon previous successful implementation of similar activities. Because the QEP is a demonstration of continuous improvement at the institution, however, there should definitely be clarity as to future plans related to the chosen topic. In most cases, QEP efforts are not formally “completed.” If successful, the QEP becomes an ingrained part of the institution’s activities and culture. In that sense, the concept of “completion” refers to what will be reported to SACSCOC within the institution’s Fifth-Year Impact Report.

Includes a plan to assess achievement

The institution may well have process outcomes for past and present initiation phases of the QEP, and that information would be a helpful part of the plan. However, this part of the standard refers specifically to the assessment of specific student learning and/or student success measures that the institution is addressing within the QEP topic. As mentioned above, if the QEP is seen as a continuous improvement activity of the institution, there is an expectation that there will be

meaningful data regarding the achievements of the QEP available when the institution submits its Fifth-Year Interim Report.

NOTES

The QEP is a course of action that is specific to an institution and its mission. It is intended to be part of self-identified needs at a 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 specific to its own comprehensive planning process.

Questions to Consider

- Has the institution identified and provided a clear and concise description of a significant topic directly related to student learning and/or student success?
- What are the specific goals of the QEP for the institution and for its students?
- How does the QEP support the mission of the institution?
- What was the research-based process that led to this issue being within the institution's comprehensive planning and evaluation processes?
- What resources (personnel, financial, physical, academic, etc.) are necessary for the successful implementation of the QEP? Look both backward and forward, depending on where the institution is in its implementation.
- What assessment instruments or data is being/will be used to measure achievement of the QEP's goals?
- How is/will the progress of the QEP be monitored (timelines, administration and oversight of its implementation by qualified individuals, etc.)?
- How will the institution ensure adequate resources and sufficient expertise and experience to guide the implementation and continuation or completion of the project?
- Who are the affected constituencies and how have they been involved in developing the QEP?

Sample Documentation

A separate QEP document/PDF apart from the Compliance Certification.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policy: [QEP: Lead Evaluator Nomination Process](#)

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

CR 7.1 *(Institutional planning)*

- CR 8.1 *(Student achievement)*
- 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)*

7.3 **The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved.**
(Administrative effectiveness)

Rationale and Notes

It is critical that administrative support services are provided effectively in order for the institution to obtain its strategic goals as well as operational efficiency. Administrative support service units normally include offices and departments such as finance and procurement, facilities and physical plant, administrative services, development/advancement, research office, the president's office, etc. These offices serve the educational mission of the institution in a much more indirect way than do offices related to educational programs or academic and student services, but they are just as critical for the ability of the institution to achieve its mission. The efficient operation of these units is critical whether these functions are provided internally or outsourced to a contractor.

While these units rarely have “expected learning outcomes,” “expected outcomes” for administrative units typically include outcomes such as efficiency and quality of service targets (e.g., energy usage, response times, error rates, “clean report” targets, satisfaction rates); monetary targets (e.g., fund-raising targets, research grant targets, auxiliary income targets). Many times, the goals are explicit parts of the budgeting process or components of the strategic plan. For this standard, institutions should interpret “expected outcome” in a manner consistent with that administrative unit's role in the institution. It is the institution's responsibility to explain how and why these expected outcomes are determined.

In many cases, administrative outcomes are hard to separate from student support outcomes. Examples would include public safety, which has an administrative function but also generally has a co-curricular student support function, and financial aid, which likewise has a budgetary function as well as a co-curricular educational function. Generally, these “dual function” units would be addressed in Standard 8.2.c (Student outcomes: academic and student services). If those units are instead addressed in this standard, it is incumbent on the institution to explain how this determination follows from its mission and organizational structure; it is strongly suggested that this explanation appear in both standards of the Compliance Certification. While institutions may organize functions differently, it is expected that all administrative services engage in a process to evaluate their effectiveness.

Institutions should determine the organizational levels at which assessment is useful and efficient for administrative units. This tends to vary greatly across institutions due to size and complexity of the institution, and explicit decisions regarding organizational structure. Institutions are not