

SECTION 9: Educational Program Structure and Content

- 9.1** Educational programs (a) embody a coherent course of study, (b) are compatible with the stated mission and goals, and (c) are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. (*Program content*) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

Collegiate-level educational programs emphasize both breadth and depth of student learning. The structure and content of a program challenges students to integrate knowledge and develop skills of analysis and inquiry.

All programs offered by the institution are directly connected to its mission and to fields of study appropriate to higher education. The term “coherence” in this standard reflects an expectation that, as a student progresses through a program of study, the content of the program demands increasing levels of integration of knowledge. 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.

The expectation that a program embodies a coherent course of study applies regardless of the mode of delivery. Thus a program offered online should be developed to ensure the program is designed to offer a coherent course of study. Similarly, a direct assessment, competency-based program should establish that the expected competencies build upon one another. See SACSCOC policies [Distance and Correspondence Education](#) and [Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs](#).

This standard focuses on the major and the degree or credential. Other standards within this section require additional detail that complement this standard’s emphasis on program coherence [see Standard 9.3 (*General education requirements*) and Standard 9.6 (*Post-baccalaureate program rigor*)], while Standard 9.7 (*Program requirements*) expects educational program requirements to be explicitly published.

NOTES

Because the [Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews](#) lists all programs at the institution, reference should be made to that document. Catalog and web program listings should also match.

Narrative should include examples drawn from a range of the institution’s educational programs across all offered degree levels, but does not have to explicitly address each program. It is presumed each program is described in more detail in the catalog of the institution.

If the institution offers some programs that are unusual, especially for the type of institution, then such programs should certainly be addressed because of parts (b) and (c) of the standard.

Questions to Consider

- Are all programs consistent with the institution's mission and goals?
- If there are highly unusual or unique programs at the institution, how did you determine that these programs are in a field of study appropriate to higher education?
- Are there policies and procedures in place that help ensure program appropriateness and program coherence (e.g., definitions of a major, prerequisite expectations for majors, oversight via curriculum committees)?
- Can the institution demonstrate that degree programs reflect coherence in sequencing, increasing complexity, and linkages between and among program components?

Sample Documentation

- [Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews](#).
- College/university publications listing courses required in each program offered, providing course descriptions, and course and program prerequisites.
- Published definitions of majors and degrees.
- Policies and processes ensuring the coherence of programs and compatibility with the mission of the institution.
- Minutes, institutional forms (preferably not blank) from curriculum committees addressing the issue of appropriateness, mission, and/or coherence.
- Information regarding degree requirements, residency requirements, and other experiences as part of a program.
- Comparative data with similar peer institutions.
- Rationales for programs and their suitability for higher education.
- State mandates providing curriculum requirements and/or guidelines.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC document: [Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews](#)

SACSCOC policies: [Direct Assessment Competency Based Educational Programs](#)
[Distance and Correspondence Education](#)

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

- Standard 9.3 (*General education requirements*)
Standard 9.6 (*Post-baccalaureate program rigor*)
Standard 9.7 (*Program requirements*)
Standard 10.4 (*Academic governance*)