Educational Programs

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND CONTENT
EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Patricia L. Donat, PhD
SACSCOC Vice President

PEER Review Process

"The heart of the U.S. accreditation system "is the accreditation team itself: a small group of peers from other institutions who come together to assess a college's compliance with accreditation standards"

(McGuire, 2009, p. 29).

Think like a reviewer

▶ Present the narrative in an organized format, following the order of the compliance elements in the standard
  ▶ Use key language from the standard so the reviewer knows what element you are addressing in each section of narrative
▶ Remember to answer the question(s) asked
▶ Address all components of the standard

Think like a reviewer

- Use your narrative to make your case for compliance
- Support your case for compliance with two types of evidence
  - Documents that describe how the institution operates: Bylaws, strategic plan, catalog, handbooks, manuals, policies, procedures, etc.
  - Documents that show how the institution operates in practice: Minutes, completed inventories, completed evaluations, completed audits, completed course approval forms, completed degree audits, copies of student complaints, assessment rubric results, survey results, redacted transcripts, etc.

Section 9: Educational program structure and content

- Programs of study listed on the Institutional Summary Form, on the institution's website, and in the institution's catalog **should be consistent** with the institution's responses to accreditation standards addressing educational programs.
- Remember to address distance education programs, as appropriate, throughout the compliance certification (i.e., not just under this section).
- Sampling: Ensure that the sample provided is sufficient and representative
  - Taking into account the institution's mission
  - Providing a valid cross-section (all divisions/schools, all levels, all delivery modes, and range of locations
  - Including a clear rationale for the sample provided

9.1: Program content

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature even though this standard is a combination of two previous standards (2.7.2, 4.2).
- Remember to address all three components:
  - Program coherence
  - Compatibility with mission/institutional goals
  - Fields of study appropriate to higher education
- This is a **core requirement**.

9.2: Program length

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of two previous standards (2.7.1, 4.4).
- Minimum requirements:
    - 60 hours for associate
    - 120 hours for baccalaureate
    - 30 hours for post-baccalaureate/graduate/professional
- Be certain to verify program lengths for **all** programs; including accelerated or combined degree programs where credits are "double counted" toward more than one degree program.
- The institution must provide an **academic** rationale for programs requiring fewer than the specified number of hours.
- This is a **core requirement**.

9.3: General education requirements

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature (previously 2.7.3).
- Be certain to address all parts of the standard:
    - College (undergraduate) level
    - Coherent rationale
    - Substantial component of undergraduate degree programs
    - Breadth of knowledge
- Courses in **basic composition** that do not contain a literature component, courses in **oral communication**, and **introductory foreign language** courses are skill courses and not pure humanities courses. Therefore, for purposes of meeting this standard, none of the above may be the one course designated to fulfill the humanities/fine arts requirement
- This is a **core requirement**.

9.4/9.5: Institutional credits for a degree (undergraduate/graduate)

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature (previously 3.5.2/3.6.3).
- Minimums:
    - 25% for undergraduate
    - 1/3 for post-baccalaureate/graduate
- This standard addresses credits *originating from the institution*
- If the institution is part of a consortium, the institution will want to ensure that it has a mechanism for verifying and documenting compliance with this standard.

9.6: Post-baccalaureate rigor and curriculum

▶ Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of two previous standards (3.6.1, 3.6.2).

▶ The curriculum is expected to be:
  ▶ Progressively more advanced
  ▶ Require knowledge of the literature of the discipline
  ▶ Include engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training

9.7: Program requirements

▶ Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of two previous standards (3.5.3, 3.6.4).

▶ Publication should provide access for faculty, students, *and prospective students.*

▶ Requirements include not only listing of required courses and total hours, but also any other graduation requirements

▶ Undergraduate degree programs include the expectation that general education requirements will be published.

Section 10: Educational policies, procedures, and practices

▶ Effective academic policies are:
  ▶ Developed in concert with appropriate input and participation of constituencies affected by policies (documentation of **approval/approval process**)
  ▶ Conform to **commonly accepted practices** and policies in higher education
  ▶ **Accurately portray** the institution's programs and services
  ▶ Are **disseminated** to those benefiting from such practices.

▶ Remember to include documentation of **implementation or enforcement** of policies (or include a statement attesting to the fact that a policy has never been implemented) for those standards requiring it

▶ There are no core requirements in this section.

10.1: Academic policies

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature (previously 3.4.5).
- Please note the section, "The Requirement of a Policy" at the front of the *Resource Manual*. Policies under this standard should be:
  - Published
  - Implemented
  - Disseminated
  - Reflect good educational practice
  - Accurately represent the institution and its programs/services

10.2: Public information

- Note that "cost of attendance" was added as a component of this standard (previously 4.3).
- This standard expects that the institution provides constituents with current information about:
  - Academic calendar
  - Grading policies
  - Cost of attendance
  - Refund policies

10.3: Archived information

- Given students' patterns of attendance and movement between institutions, access to archived catalogs is essential. Institutions need to provide documentation that students have access to these archived documents, regardless of their format (digital/print).

10.4: Academic governance

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of three previous standards (3.4.1, 3.4.10, 3.7.5)
- Be certain to address all parts of the standard:
  - Policies regarding the faculty role in academic and governance matters
  - Involvement in governance (i.e.,, standing committees, strategic planning, ad hoc committees, Faculty Senate)
  - Approval process for educational programs (which it is assumed will include faculty and administrative approvals)
  - Responsibility of faculty for content, quality, and effectiveness of curriculum

10.5: Admissions policies and practices

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of three previous standards (3.4.3, 3.13.7, 4.6).
- Be certain to address all parts of the standard:
  - Publication of policies that are consistent with mission
  - Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution
  - Documentation that independent contractors or agents also follow the same principles and policies

10.6: Distance and correspondence education

- Editorial changes are not intended to be substantive in nature, even though this standard is a combination of three previous standards (4.8.1, 4.8.2, 4.8.3)
- Be certain to address all parts of this standard:
  - Verification of student identity
  - Protections for student privacy (Note: Mentioning FERPA alone is not sufficient as it applies to all students.)
  - Notification of additional charges associated with verification of student identity

10.7: Policies for awarding credit

- This standard combines three previous standards (3.4.6, 3.4.8, 4.9) and
  - clarifies the applicability of the standard to traditional, online, and direct assessment programs and
  - the importance of the role of individuals who are academically qualified to make decisions about the amount and level of credit awarded.
- Remember to include the policy and then describe and document the process for determining **both** the **amount** and the **level** of credit.
- This standard addresses the awarding of credit for courses **originating with the institution**.

10.8: Evaluating and awarding academic credit

- This standard addresses the awarding of credit for courses **not originating with the institution** (i.e., transfer, experiential learning, credit by examination, Advanced Placement, etc.).
- Be certain to address all parts of the standard:
  - Policies and procedures for ensuring academic quality
  - Oversight by academic qualified individuals in the approval process (addition to previous 3.4.4)
  - Equivalency of credit to credit originating at the institution

10.9: Cooperative academic arrangements

- This standard addresses the awarding of credit for courses **not** originating with the institution and offered through a cooperative academic arrangement, but transcripted as the institution's own credit (previously 3.4.7, 3.13.2).
  - Be certain to review both **domestic** and **international** cooperative academic arrangements where instruction that is not provided by the institution (and its own faculty), but is transcripted as institutional credit.
  - The agreement and institutional practices should have robust **mechanisms to ensure the quality and the integrity** of the academic work recorded on the transcript.

Questions?

NOTE: THE *RESOURCE MANUAL* WILL BE PUBLISHED TO THE
SACSCOC WEBSITE BY MARCH 1, 2018.