

II.4 Outcomes assessment

The Standards and the current accreditation process emphasize ongoing planning, self evaluation, and the use of program outcomes assessment by accredited programs. Each school and program will have its own ways of expressing its goals, determining desired outcomes, and measuring its accomplishments. The results of developing and evaluating outcomes assessments will be a unique set of measures of what constitutes success for the school and program. Many institutions have tools and resources that departments and programs can use to help develop and measure outcomes. These resources are often available on university websites. An annotated list of selected outcomes assessment and evaluation tools is available on the Office for Accreditation website.

Under the Standards, programs should use outcomes assessment as part of the ongoing planning and evaluation process. This process consists of setting a mission, defining goals, enumerating objectives, identifying appropriate measures and benchmarks, comparing what has been achieved to what was intended, and using what is learned to make improvements. Outcomes assessment provides the Program Head and faculty with information to make useful decisions about program improvement and to develop strategies for continuous improvement. These measures indicate how a program's achievements can be assessed, and they also provide evidence that program objectives are being achieved.

The process of outcomes assessment ultimately results in revision of the objectives and goals of a school and program. The outcomes can, and should, affect future strategic planning. Effective outcomes assessment means that the school and program have established and use broad-based, continuous program planning, development, assessment, and improvement.

As part of the accreditation process, the program, the ERP, and the COA should ask these questions about outcomes assessment:

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objectives for skills, thinking and practice in the discipline, and preparations for lifelong learning. The development of measures for teaching might begin with answering questions such as: What methods of presentation accommodate various learning styles? How are students encouraged to practice and apply their learning? Resources on systematic outcomes