

Invitation for Member Comments on Proposed Change of Standards

During the June 2017 session of the ACCJC Commission, the Board of Directors voted to approve as a First Read a new policy that allows the Commission to review and propose changes to individual ACCJC Standards without waiting for the comprehensive review of all Standards that happens on a ten-year cycle. This proposed policy has been posted for public comment. In view of strong Commission and member support for this policy, it is anticipated that it will be approved at the next Commission session in January. A current application of this policy is addressed here:

During several previous sessions, the Commission has addressed its concerns about Standard III.A.6. Commissioners have noted ambiguities and related difficulties for both institutions and peer review teams in knowing how to demonstrate compliance with the Standard. At the initiation of the Executive Committee, and with the concurrence of the Commissioners, the attached "Proposal re Standards III.A.6 and II.A.2" is being posted here as a First Read. Comments from constituents are invited. Following this period for comments, and subsequent to the approval of the policy noted above, the Commission will take action on this Proposal at its January 2018 session. In anticipation of its approval, staff will prepare guidance on how the change will be implemented in subsequent reviews.

You are invited to read the proposal and to evaluate the reasons being put forth in support of the proposed changes. Please address any comments to my attention at rwinn@accjc.org

Thank you for your engagement in this important process.

Richard Winn, President
ACCJC

Proposal Regarding Standard III.A.6

The evaluation of faculty, academic administrators, and other personnel directly responsible for student learning includes, as a component of that evaluation, consideration of how these employees use the results of the assessment of learning outcomes to improve teaching and learning. – ACCJC Standard III.A.6

PART 1: In light of the following concerns, the ACCJC Commission proposes the removal of Standard III.A.6 and an expanded focus of Standard II.A.2, based on the following considerations:

- By placing Standard III.A.6 under the heading of Standard III.A “Human Resources,” it conflates a student learning focus with a personnel performance expectation.
- The Standard is susceptible to the inference that student learning is largely the result of an individual faculty member’s efforts rather than of a collective and collaborative effort among program faculty.
- It has been found to be difficult to propose a metric or action that could be used consistently by teams to determine compliance with the Standard.
- The “unit of measure” for establishing compliance is typically based on the self-reported actions of single individuals, which is a granular evaluation focus for a review team and difficult for a team to substantiate. There are instances in which review teams have requested access to confidential performance review files in fulfilling what they saw as their obligation under the evaluation of this Standard.
- As presently understood, this Standard is often seen as an intrusion into the domain of collective bargaining since faculty performance reviews are a negotiated aspect of a union contract.
- Standard III.A.5 already focuses on the value of performance evaluations while not singling out this area of academic engagement as a criterion.
- It is ambiguous as to who is covered by the phrase, “other personnel directly involved.” This leaves institutions to make sometimes inconsistent delineations of whom to include in this category – which teams may then second-guess during their review, expecting other groups to have been included.
- In preparing their ISER, institutions have reported widely varying practices in how they apply the aspect of the Standard that requires “consideration of how these employees use the results of the assessment of learning outcomes to improve teaching and learning” in conducting personnel evaluations. This leaves teams – and, ultimately, the Commission – in an uncertain position as to how to determine compliance in a consistent manner over time.

PART 2: An important goal of these proposed revisions is to refocus the evaluative spotlight from the individual toward a shared practice. Teams should not be expected to make judgments about if, or how well, individual faculty members are performing their work. If individuals are not appropriately engaged in the use of student data, that should be a departmental concern. Since the improvement of program-level student learning outcomes is largely a collective activity among groups of faculty, evaluation teams can focus on the institution's collaborative conversations in which appropriate faculty groups review assessment results and make shared decisions about improving the curriculum or pedagogy. These are common and standard practices in higher education. Peer evaluators can inquire as to whether program review practices include the relevant stakeholders rather than checking the files of individual faculty, counselors, or librarians. Note that Standards I.B.1 to I.B.6 place the responsibility for assessment and use of learning outcomes at the institutional and collective levels rather than at the individual level.

The Commission's desire to see assessment outcomes employed to improve learning could be addressed by more precisely emphasizing group expectations with this proposed expansion of Standard II.A.2:

Redline Version:

Standard II.A.2. Faculty, including full time, part time, and adjunct faculty, regularly engage in ensuring that the content and methods of instruction meet generally accepted academic and professional standards and expectations. In exercising collective ownership over the design and improvement of the learning experience, ~~Faculty and others responsible act to~~conduct systematic and inclusive program review, using student achievement data, in order to continuously improve instructional courses and, programs ~~and directly related services through systematic evaluation to assure~~thereby ensuring program currency, improving teaching and learning strategies, and promoting student success.

Edited Version:

Standard II.A.2. Faculty, including full time, part time, and adjunct faculty, regularly engage in ensuring that the content and methods of instruction meet generally accepted academic and professional standards and expectations. In exercising collective ownership over the design and improvement of the learning experience, faculty conduct systematic and inclusive program review, using student achievement data, in order to continuously improve instructional courses and programs, thereby ensuring program currency, improving teaching and learning strategies, and promoting student success.