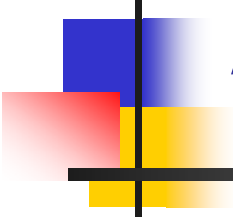


# Regional Accreditation Requirements and Outcomes Assessment



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# The Call to Assess

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- 25 years of “encouragement”
- Incorporation in most accreditation criteria in late 1980’s
- Minimal response from higher education
- Minimal reaction from accrediting agencies



# A Tonal Shift--

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- Greater emphasis after 2000
- SACS revised standards in 2004
- Middle States revised standards in 2002:
  - *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* (2003)
  - *Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness* (2005)



# Accreditors on Learning:

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- Quality defined by “how well [a higher learning institution] fulfills its declared learning mission”
- Student learning documented by:
  - Setting clear learning goals
  - Collecting evidence of attainment
  - Applying collective judgment to meaning and utility of evidence



# Accreditors on Learning

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- Evidence is used to effect improvement
- Institution uses multiple sources and kinds of evidence
- Institutions shares results with stakeholders

(CRAC Statement, 2003)



## Thus Institutions Should:

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- Clearly define learning goals
- Clearly define learning outcomes
- Align learning outcomes with mission at institutional, course, and program level
- Plan curricula to develop outcomes



# Institutions Should:

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- Articulate criteria and measures for student learning artifacts
- Apply criteria and measures to student learning artifacts
- Use multiple measures
- Examine/interpret data
- Use the results



# MSCHE on Assessment of Student Learning

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- “Developing clearly articulated *learning outcomes*: the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students are expected to exhibit upon successful completion of a course, academic program, co-curricular program, general education requirement, or other specific set of experiences.”



# MSCHE on Assessment of Student Learning

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- “Offering courses, programs, and experiences that provide purposeful *opportunities for students to achieve those learning outcomes*”
- “*Assessing student achievement of those learning outcomes*”

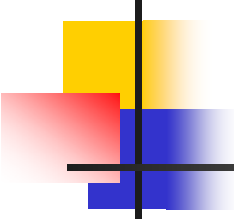


# MSCHE on Assessment of Student Learning

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- *“Using the results of those assessments to improve teaching and learning and inform planning and resource allocation decisions.”*

*(Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness, 2005)*



# SACS on Assessment of Student Learning

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- 3.3.1: "The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves those outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results."



## Some Inferences:

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- *Outcomes* describe what a student can do with what s/he *knows*
- *Outcomes* are a *result*; thus planning and design should consider the end of a course, program, or experience
- *Assessment* should focus on improvement, not reporting



## Some More Inferences:

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- Data-*based* but not data-*limited*
- Multiple measures, qualitative and/or quantitative
- Direct and/or indirect evidence
- No required methodology or instrument
- Information must be *used* to improve learning
- *Learning assessment* is a part of the assessment of institutional effectiveness



# Evidence vs. Inquiry

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- A culture of evidence tends to focus on the data, ergo on reporting
- A culture of inquiry focuses on creating knowledge from data, ergo on interpretation and use
- “Evidence never contains its own explanation.”
  - Richard Alford, *The Craft of Inquiry* (1998)



# The Nature of Evidence

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- Provides information directly or indirectly about a subject
- Is neither “good” nor “bad” inherently
- Requires context to be meaningful



# Kinds of Evidence

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- Qualitative (“subjective”: interviews, focus groups, surveys, open-ended questions)
- Quantitative (“objective”: survey data, scales, rankings)
- Direct (demonstrated learning)
- Indirect (perceptions and other data from which learning can be inferred)



# Meaningful Evidence

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- Addresses core issues and outcomes at institutional, major, and course levels
- Addresses relevant questions
- Can be considered in the context of *other* evidence



# The GAIA Process

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- Gather
- Analyze
- Interpret
- Act



## Gather:

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- Are data relevant to learning?
- Are data appropriate to institutional, major, and course outcomes?
- Are data credibly connected to one another and to intended outcomes?



# Analyze:

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- Are data valid?
- Are data reliable?
- Do data suggest patterns?
- Do data fall into natural groupings?



# Interpret:

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- What do these data mean in the context of other data?
- How do other forms of evidence shape or modify our understanding?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the interaction of multiple forms of evidence?



# Interpreting Data

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- Seniors do not feel a sense of engagement and belonging on our campus (national survey).
- Seniors would recommend this institution to others (exit survey).
- In the last five years, 82% of first-year alumni donated to this institution (Alumni Office).



# Act:

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- Policy decisions
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Assessment practice
- Accountability
- FOCUS: Improving learning



## In Practical Terms:

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- Evidence has no inherent value without the context of student learning
- Evidence has value if it can be interpreted and can lead to improved learning
- Evidence has value if it opens up new questions



## Some Conclusions:

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- Actions should be data-*based*, not necessarily data-*driven*
- Multiple sources of evidence are essential
- A mix of *kinds* of relevant evidence is likely to produce better action



# Five Fundamental Questions

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- How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?
- What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
- In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?



# Five Fundamental Questions

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- How do you ensure shared responsibility for student learning?
- How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?

(Higher Learning Commission, 2005)