

8.2.b The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results for student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs. (*Student outcomes: general education*)

Rationale and Notes

General education is a critical element of undergraduate degree programs, yet the delivery of courses related to general education is often dispersed across multiple academic departments. As a result, there is a tendency for this extremely important part of the undergraduate degree experience to be assessed, revised, and discussed in a haphazard fashion. This standard ensures that general education competencies are specifically addressed by establishing expected learning outcomes, assessing these outcomes, and providing evidence of seeking improvements based on the findings.

The standard does not mandate a specific approach to this outcomes assessment process. The approach is up to the institution, consistent with principles of good practice, the role general education plays in that institution's curricula, and the organizational structure of the institution. The institution is responsible for identifying measures of expected student learning outcomes to determine the extent to which students have attained appropriate college-level competencies.

NOTES

See the Standard 8.2 general discussion as well as this substandard for full coverage of this standard within the Resource Manual. Note that "Sampling" does not apply to general education assessment due to the limited number of competencies involved.

This standard only applies to undergraduate degree programs. The term "collegiate-level" implies that assessment of general education competencies within developmental courses generally is not appropriate. This standard does not apply to noncredit programs.

It is acceptable to implement a schedule of assessment in which only a subset of competencies is evaluated in a given year. It is expected, however, that all competencies would be evaluated within the multiple-year cycle, and that the institution provides evidence of assessment findings and of actions seeking improvement across the full cycle. It is unusual for a multiple-year cycle to exceed three years.

Different institutions use widely different approaches to determine expected general education outcomes for their students, and they may also use very different means to deliver general education. Some institutions have a very prescriptive set of courses, while others offer a smorgasbord of courses. Some institutions augment basic core courses with additional general education outcomes within the major (e.g., writing across the curriculum or discipline-specific critical learning skills). Some institutions collect the bulk of their assessment data regarding general education early in the student's studies, while others rely on assessments closer to the time of graduation. Larger institutions may have multiple approaches across different colleges and schools. Community colleges may have different general education expectations for students earning technical degrees than for those seeking transfer degrees. Some institutions will utilize embedded assignments within broad general

education core courses as part of its set of assessments, others will utilize upper-level courses or external evaluations to capture these outcomes, and still others will turn to their alumni for some of their assessments. Because of these variations, reviewers must be even more mindful of the dangers of a “one size fits all” approach for general education than for student learning outcomes within defined majors.

Conversely, due to the variability in the ways that institutions establish, teach toward, and assess general education competencies, it is essential that institutions carefully describe their concepts and results for this integral component of undergraduate programs.

As an institutional improvement standard, the expectation is not that the institution be required to certify the competency of each student. The institution undertakes that process when it issues a diploma. The intent of the standard is for the institution to make continuous improvements by assessing itself through its assessment of students.

Questions to Consider

- What is the organizational structure that allows the institution to gain a sense of consistency in its expectations regarding general education outcomes?
- What expected learning outcomes capture the intended college-level general education competencies the institution envisions for its undergraduate students?
- Where and when are these expected learning outcomes best assessed? Within the course where they are taught? Within other courses that utilize the material taught earlier in the college experience? By external instruments that can be benchmarked to peers?
- How will the institution maintain consistency in its measurements across different programs of study?
- How (and by whom) are the findings analyzed in order to take possible action on the findings?
- If weaknesses are found, what process is there to seek improvements in the delivery of general education learning experiences?
- How does this standard relate to the rationale underlying the general education component of the curriculum? See Standard 9.2 (*General education requirements*).
- How are off-campus, distance education, and transfer students included in this process?

Sample Documentation

- Identification of student learning outcomes from the institution’s expected competencies of graduates.
- If different units of the institution use different approaches, a discussion and rationale for each.
- Justification that all measures are intended to capture college-level learning.
- Descriptions of the assessment measures used to collect information on student learning.
- Details on the assessment and analysis of results from these assessments.

- Specific examples where the findings from analysis of results have led to efforts to improve the general education component of undergraduate degree programs.
- Specific attention to the way off-campus, distance education, and transfer students are part of this process.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policy: [*Distance and Correspondence Education*](#)

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

CR 7.1 *(Institutional planning)*

Standard 7.2 *(Quality Enhancement Plan)*

CR 8.1 *(Student achievement)*

Standard 9.3 *(General education requirements)*