

Evaluation and Accreditation of Institutions of Postsecondary Education

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The Purposes of Institutional Accreditation

Accreditation is a nongovernmental, voluntary means to provide public confirmation that what the institution is doing is of acceptable quality and to assist each institution in improving its own activities. These two purposes, public certification and institutional improvement, constitute the basic mission of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Institutional improvement is assisted through the activities of self-study and self-evaluation, required periodically of accredited institutions, and through the counsel provided to institutions by the Commission's staff, evaluation teams, and review committees.

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

The North Central Association's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is the largest of the regional accrediting commissions, accrediting postsecondary educational institutions of all types and at all degree levels in the nineteen-state North Central region. The activities of the Commission are directed by fifteen Commissioners—twelve persons from member institutions and three public members. Primary responsibility for the review of institutional evaluations and assurance of their quality is placed in the group of approximately 100 Accreditation Review Council members appointed under procedures that ensure representation throughout the range of types of institutions accredited by the Commission and throughout the geographic area of the North Central region. The evaluation teams, which have primary responsibility for on-site evaluation of and counsel to institutions, are drawn from a group of more than 700 Consultant-Evaluators, each of whom is widely experienced in higher education and is associated with an accredited institution. A full-time staff in the Commission's Chicago office responds to inquiries and provides assistance to institutions and evaluation teams both during the self-study and evaluation processes and after the evaluation.

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Forms of Affiliation

Postsecondary educational institutions may be affiliated with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, and through it with the North Central Association, in either of two ways: one is as an accredited institution; the other is as a candidate institution. Both affiliations are voluntary. There are currently more than 950 institutions affiliated with the Commission.

Both accredited and candidate institutions must meet the General Institutional Requirements of the Commission. They must also meet the Criteria for the status sought.

General Institutional Requirements

An institution may be affiliated with the Commission, and through the Commission with the Association, as either an accredited institution or as a candidate for accreditation (see further comments on candidacy at the beginning of the list of candidate institutions). In either case the institution must meet the General Institutional Requirements.

The General Institutional Requirements were revised in 1987 following an extensive review of the current GIRs by the staff and Commissioners and circulation of the proposed changes to all institutions for response. The revisions were approved by the Commission in August 1987. These new requirements, published in November 1987, require every undergraduate institution to have at least one program of two or more years in length; strengthen the emphasis on general education and/or related studies in programs two years in length; add a requirement for faculty; strengthen emphasis on public representation on the governing board; and add more specific requirements for finance and public disclosure.

The General Institutional Requirements express the Commission's expectations for an affiliated institution in several areas: Mission and authorization, Educational programs, Institutional organization, Financial resources, and Public disclosure:

Mission and authorization

- 1.a. The institution has formally adopted and made public its statement of mission.
- 1.b. The statement of mission is appropriate to an institution of higher education.
- 1.c. The institution confers certificates, diplomas or degrees.
- 1.d. The institution has legal authority to confer its certificates, diplomas and degrees.
- 1.e. The institution meets all legal requirements to operate wherever it conducts activities.

Educational programs

- 2.a. The educational programs are compatible with the institution's mission.
- 2.b. The principal educational programs are based on recognized fields of study at the postsecondary level.

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- 2.c. At least one of the undergraduate programs is two or more academic years in length (or the equivalent). If no undergraduate programs are offered, at least one of the graduate programs is one or more academic years in length (or the equivalent).
- 2.d. General education at the postsecondary level is an essential element of undergraduate degree programs and a prerequisite to graduate degree programs.
- 2.e. General education and/or a program of related instruction at the postsecondary level is an essential element of undergraduate certificate and diploma programs two or more academic years in length.
- 2.f. The certificate, diploma or degree awarded upon successful completion of an educational program is appropriate to the demonstrated attainment of the graduate.

Institutional organization

- 3.a. There is a governing board, legally responsible for the institution, which establishes and regularly reviews basic policies that govern the institution and protect its integrity.
- 3.b. The governing board includes individuals who represent the public interest. (Note: In rare situations the Commission may approve alternative means by which the interests of the public are appropriately represented when unusual circumstances prohibit public representatives on the board.)
- 3.c. An executive officer is designated by the governing board to administer the institution.
- 3.d. A faculty comprising persons qualified by education and experience is significantly involved in the development and review of the educational programs.
- 3.e. Admissions policies are consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to the educational programs.
- 3.f. Admissions practices conform to the admissions policies.

Financial resources

- 4.a. The institution has financial resources sufficient to support its activities.
- 4.b. The institution has its financial statements externally audited on a regular schedule by a certified public accountant or state audit agency.

Public disclosure

- 5.a. The institution publishes in its catalog or other appropriate places accurate information that fairly describes
 - i. its educational programs,
 - ii. its policies and procedures directly affecting students,
 - iii. its charges and its refund policies,
 - iv. the academic credentials of its faculty members and administrators.
- 5.b. The institution makes available upon request accurate information that fairly describes its financial resources.

Unaccredited postsecondary institutions meeting these requirements are eligible to apply for consideration for candidacy or accreditation; normally an institution seeking accreditation with the Commission should first seek candidacy. An unaccredited institution should write to the Executive Director of the Commission indicating its intention to apply; the Executive Director can provide counsel and detailed information on the process.

Criteria for Accreditation

Institutional accreditation of colleges and universities, as originally devised by the North Central Association in 1913, was based upon the application of explicit, largely quantitative standards describing required resources and organizational procedures for an accredited institution. The institution's role was passive, and the Association took no responsibility other than to measure the institution against its stated standards.

Such a process has certain advantages in providing explicit guidance to institutions. But it has serious drawbacks in setting out a rigid framework into which each institution must be forced. In addition, research studies have shown that such standards, unless they are voluminous (and as a consequence difficult to apply) overlook important characteristics of institutions, and—more importantly—neglect the interactions among different parts of an institution described by different standards.

The development of higher education in the twenties to meet new needs of society made these deficiencies of the standards apparent and demanded a different approach to institutional accreditation. The one adopted and developed for now more than fifty years by the Commission relies on the fundamental definition of institutional quality as a measure of success in meeting appropriate educational purposes. Thus the Criteria begin with the purposes of the institution, and their appropriateness, and move from those purposes to inquire (a) whether the institution has on hand the resources and processes so that it can accomplish its purposes, (b) whether there is evidence that it is accomplishing its purposes, and (c) whether its organization and support give reason to believe that it will continue to accomplish its purposes.

While the Criteria for Accreditation are stated in general terms and apply to the whole institution, the judgment that the institution meets the Criteria is based on detailed information about all parts of the institution summarized in the Self-Study Report and other institutional documents, and in the written report of the evaluation team.

An action to accredit an institution expresses the opinion of the Commission that the institution meets the following **Criteria for Accreditation**:

The institution

1. has clear and publicly stated purposes, consistent with its mission and appropriate to a postsecondary educational institution;

2. has effectively organized adequate human, financial and physical resources into educational and other programs to accomplish its purposes;
3. is accomplishing its purposes;
4. can continue to accomplish its purposes.

An institution found upon evaluation to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation is granted accreditation. A comprehensive evaluation to reaffirm accreditation will be scheduled within five years of the initial accreditation decision. Thereafter, the Commission will make comprehensive evaluations to reaffirm accreditation not more than ten years apart; currently more than half of the Commission's accredited institutions are scheduled for comprehensive evaluations at intervals less than the maximum.

The Commission may also schedule focused visits and/or require written reports between comprehensive evaluations. Such visits and reports are decided individually for each institution, and reflect the Commission's judgment of changes that are occurring within the institution that require monitoring so that the Commission's certification of accreditation can continue to be appropriate and well-justified.

Comprehensive evaluations to grant accreditation and subsequent evaluations to reaffirm accreditation are conducted by the same process:

1. The institution undertakes a self-study and self-evaluation, guided by the Criteria for Accreditation. The results of the self-study are summarized in a report that forms the basis for the Commission's evaluation. The report should also document that the institution continues to meet the General Institutional Requirements. The completed Self-Study Report constitutes the institution's application for initial or continued accreditation.
2. The institution is visited by a team of evaluators appointed by the Commission. The team gathers information about the institution and summarizes its findings in a written report and recommendation for accreditation action. The institution may respond to the team recommendation.
3. The Self-Study Report and the Team Report are reviewed either by several readers and/or a review committee which meets with institutional representatives and the team chair. Changes in the team recommendation may be suggested. Such changes are made available to the institution and the team chair for response.
4. The several recommendations and responses come to the Commission which takes action on the institution's accreditation.

The action of the Commission is contained in a **Statement of Affiliation Status**, which identifies the institution and its accredited status, the locations at which it offers educational services, the degree levels awarded, any stipulations restricting the institution's work, any

written reports (other than the Annual Report) required, and further evaluations scheduled. Any change in the activity of the institution that would alter the Statement of Affiliation Status requires prior approval of the Commission.

Candidate for Accreditation Status

In 1972 the Commission instituted a single pre-accreditation status of affiliation, candidate for accreditation. Candidacy status indicates that an institution appears to have the potential to achieve accreditation, and that it is progressing toward accreditation.

The Commission's evaluation for candidate for accreditation status is addressed to the Criteria presented below. Since these Criteria are different from (although closely related to) the Criteria for Accreditation, a candidate institution is not accredited, and the Commission can make no guarantee that it will achieve accreditation.

While the Criteria are stated in general terms and apply to the whole institution, the judgment that the institution meets the Criteria is based on detailed information about all parts of the institution summarized in the Self-Study Report for candidacy and other institutional documents, and in the written report of the evaluation team.

An action to grant candidacy status expresses the opinion of the Commission that the institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and the following **Criteria for Candidacy for Accreditation**:

The institution

1. has clear and publicly stated purposes, consistent with its mission and appropriate to a postsecondary educational institution;
2. has effectively organized adequate human, financial and physical resources into educational and other programs so that it is accomplishing its immediate purposes;
3. is following realistic plans to acquire and organize any additional resources needed to accomplish all its stated purposes;
4. has the potential to achieve accreditation within the candidacy period.

The Criteria for Candidacy are closely related to the Criteria for Accreditation since they are meant to provide candidate institutions with a foundation for logical development toward accreditation. The Criteria for Candidacy differ from those for accreditation, reflecting the fact that a candidate institution has not yet developed to the point where it meets the Criteria for Accreditation and is, therefore, accreditable.

Candidacy must be reaffirmed by evaluation every two years. These biennial evaluations confirm that the institution continues to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria, and also assist the institution in moving toward accredited status.

The maximum length of the candidacy period is six years. Extensions beyond the sixth year require special consideration and action by the Commission, and are granted only rarely. The candidacy period has no required minimum length, nor is candidacy required as a preliminary step toward accreditation.

When an institution first requests affiliation with the Commission, it must provide documentation showing that it appears to meet the General Institutional Requirements. If examination of the documentation indicates that the institution **appears** to meet the GIRs, a member of the Commission staff will be assigned to advise the institution as it proceeds through the candidacy process. The Commission's process of evaluation for both initial and continued candidacy has been formulated to determine whether an institution meets all of the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Candidacy for Accreditation. It may be divided into four parts.

1. The institution prepares a Self-Study Report for candidacy which documents that it satisfies the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Candidacy for Accreditation. This Report forms the basis for the Commission's evaluation and constitutes the institution's formal application for candidacy for accreditation. In preparation for subsequent biennial visits for continued candidacy, the institution revises the original Report, showing the progress it has made toward fulfilling the Criteria for Accreditation. Through successive revisions during the candidacy period the Self-Study Report for candidacy is converted into the Self-Study Report for initial accreditation.
2. The institution is visited by a team of evaluators appointed by the Commission. The team gathers information about the institution and summarizes its findings in a written Team Report which offers advice and suggestions for improvement, assesses whether the institution satisfies the Criteria for Candidacy, and concludes with a recommendation for action on the institution's application for candidacy. The institution has an opportunity to make a formal written response to the Team Report.
3. The Self-Study Report and the Team Report are reviewed by a Readers' Panel and/or by a Review Committee which meets with institutional representatives and the team chair. If this review process produces substantial changes in the team's original recommendation, the institution and the team chairperson are offered the opportunity to respond in writing.
4. All recommendations and responses are considered by the Commission, which takes official action on the institution's candidacy.

The action of the Commission is contained in a **Statement of Affiliation Status**, which identifies the institution and its candidacy status, the locations at which it offers educational services, the degree levels awarded, any stipulations restricting the institution's work, any written reports (other than the Annual Report) required, and future evaluations scheduled. Any change in the activity of the institution that would alter the Statement of Affiliation Status requires prior approval of the Commission.

**NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
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TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The following characteristics are provided as a guide and stimulus to ongoing discussion and collaboration within and among institutions. They are an elaboration of material that first appeared in an article entitled "Criterion Three and the Assessment of Student Academic Achievement" by Gerald Patton and Austin Doherty, in the *NCA-CIHE Assessment Workbook (1991)*.

1. FLOWS FROM THE INSTITUTION'S MISSION

Central to the existence of every institution of higher education is the intention to educate students, to ensure their academic growth and attainment, and to certify other levels of accomplishment publicly through awarding credits and diplomas. Each institution expresses this central aspect of its mission and purposes in language that recognizes the particular characteristics that distinguish it from its peers: its origin and tradition, the types of students it serves, the kinds of education and professional training it seeks to provide those students, and its philosophy of learning. It is this specific formulation of mission and purposes that will determine what the appropriate assessment program will be, and how the results of that program will be utilized to provide evidence of students' academic achievement and to enable the institution to use the results of such assessment to improve its educational programs and instruction and thus further enhance student learning. This characteristic, therefore, directly links assessment to Criterion One.

2. HAS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The assessment program must be constructed upon a conceptual framework that flows directly from the institution's published mission and purposes. The conceptual framework should be presented in a narrative that describes what the institution understands to be the relationships of the kinds of skill and knowledge it expects its students to gain, the curricula it offers, the modes of teaching and learning it stresses, the means of assessment it employs, and the ways in which the results of assessment are to be used to improve student learning.

One of the values of developing a conceptual framework is that the process itself provides an invaluable opportunity for faculty and administrators to examine and reconsider the expectations they have for themselves and their students and to probe relationships between and among mission, student academic achievement, contributions of resources to this achievement, and future directions to ensure continued achievement.

3. HAS FACULTY OWNERSHIP/RESPONSIBILITY

Given the historic responsibility of faculty in determining credit, certificate and degree requirements, the content of courses, and what is to be accepted as evidence that a student's accomplishment has met established standards, it is self-evident that the faculty must assume primary responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of any program to assess student academic achievement. This fact in no way precludes participation by academic administrators or the use of consultants whose research or experience would enable them to serve as helpful resources. The means by which faculty carry out their responsibility for the design and implementation of an assessment program will, of course, depend upon the organization of the faculty and the form of governance in place within the institution.

4. HAS INSTITUTION-WIDE SUPPORT

Board members, the chief executive and chief academic officers, and all other administrators and staff, as well as the faculty, should be informed and in basic agreement about the nature and importance of on-going assessment of student academic achievement.

In order to achieve this end, academic officers and faculty committees may find that it is helpful to provide clear, written descriptions of the respective roles and responsibilities of the individuals and groups comprising the academic community who are to develop student assessment goals and support assessment activities so that assessment is accepted as an integral part of institutional existence. The planning documents, the resource allocations (budget), and other institutional decisions, should reflect that the institution is monitoring how well the institution is meeting its goals for student learning and should document how to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching. Publications intended for internal and public distribution should stress the centrality of student learning and achievement and describe how the assessment program contributes to the institution's continued attention to this important aspect of its mission and purposes.

5. USES MULTIPLE MEASURES

Because of the variety of components that are required to provide a full description of student academic achievement and the importance of assessing whether achievement at various stages in the student's academic experiences constitutes appropriate progress, it is essential that the assessment program employ multiple measures. No one instrument is sufficiently complex to capture the range of student achievement necessary for the institution to make a judgment regarding how well it is fulfilling its purposes in this area. It is therefore necessary for the institution to use a variety of measures in seeking ways to improve student learning. Taken together, the results of these diverse means of assessment provide the major information that should be integrated into the institution's review and planning processes to improve its educational programs.

6. PROVIDES FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS AND THE INSTITUTION

In order for student achievement assessment to be valuable to an institution, the results of the various types of assessment should be incorporated into appropriate levels of planning and resource allocation so that the weaknesses identified through assessment can be corrected and the strengths revealed by the process can be maintained.

Individual students have been found to profit significantly from timely and specific information about the quality of their present performance in relation to their own past performance. Feedback is a spur to improved learning. Care should be taken, therefore, to ensure that among the multiple measures used, some provide students with the information relevant to improving their individual academic performance.

7. IS COST-EFFECTIVE

In the climate of financial austerity in which most institutions of higher learning are now functioning, it is important that available monetary and human resources be prudently and effectively deployed. The assessment program should be designed to seek information directly relevant to institutional improvement and to obtain that information at a reasonable cost in time and money.

As the assessment program is itself evaluated on a recurrent basis, the institution should examine whether its expenditures for gathering various types of information, and for analyzing and interpreting the results of the multiple measures of achievement in place, are sound and judicious.

8. DOES NOT RESTRICT OR INHIBIT GOALS OF ACCESS, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY ESTABLISHED BY THE INSTITUTION

If an institution develops a conceptual framework for its student achievement assessment program based directly upon its mission and purposes, the resultant means of assessment are likely to be appropriate to the particular student body it serves and in harmony with its institutional goals pertaining to access, equity and diversity. If, however, a limited view of what constitutes appropriate measures of achievement becomes dominant, important values that have traditionally guided the institution may be seriously weakened. It is essential, therefore, that the institution keep its values and purposes clearly in mind when deciding how best to measure student achievement.

9. LEADS TO IMPROVEMENT

North Central views assessment of student academic achievement, and all concurrent and related evaluations of curriculum, teaching, and instructional support services and facilities, as a means to increasing students' learning, academic achievement, and individual/personal development. Since neither the process of assessment nor knowledge of the results of assessment automatically leads to constructive change and improvement,

institutions need to incorporate into their regular planning process the requirement that faculty and administrators specify the actions they will take in response to the results of the assessment of student achievement when improvement is called for. The planning process also needs to make explicit that the institution will evaluate whether the steps proposed to improve student achievement have indeed resulted in the desired improvement. That faculty and administrators are using the information provided by the assessment program to make plans, set timetables, and allocate resources, is, in the judgment of North Central, critically important.

10. HAS A PROCESS IN PLACE FOR EVALUATING THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Like other programs in the institution, the assessment program itself needs to be evaluated. An evaluation process will determine whether the conceptual framework is sound, whether all components are appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes, whether the data gathered are being used for the intended purposes, and whether the primary goal of the program--the improvement of educational programs and the enhancement of student academic achievement--is being attained. Only through comprehensive evaluation can the institution determine what adaptations need to be made in its assessment program to ensure its greater effectiveness.

Commission Announces Phase-In Plan for New Requirement on Assessment

In voting to accept the new Statement on Assessment and Student Academic Achievement, the Commission understood that a phase-in period would be necessary, and that some structured and equitable form of monitoring and follow-up would be required. The following phase-in and program of monitoring applies to all affiliated institutions. It links the speed and thoroughness of the phase-in and monitoring to the passage of time. The phase-in plan is being communicated to all institutions and Consultant-Evaluators through a special mailing in June 1991.

All comprehensive evaluations between 1991-2001 will include an evaluation of the institution's response to this requirement. Institutions will document their programs in their Self-Study Reports and evaluation teams will discuss the institution's program in their team reports and recommendations.

However, the Commission is committed to reviewing the progress of all of its affiliated institutions within the next five years. To achieve that goal, it has developed several categories of institutions, and has established a phase-in plan for each of them.

Institutions on the 1991-92 Evaluation Cycle

- Evaluation teams conducting comprehensive visits will review the progress made by institutions in responding to the Commission's initiative. As outlined in the article, "Developing an Appropriate Team Recommendation on Assessment Programs," (see page 1) teams will have to weigh the nature and scope of the institution's efforts in determining whether the Commission needs to conduct further monitoring either through required reports or focused visits.

- Teams conducting focused visits in 1991-92 may or may not be asked to evaluate the institution's progress. Staff will determine in consultation with the institution whether the visit can be expanded to include review of the development of a program of documenting student academic achievement. If they agree not to expand the purpose of the visit, then the institution will fall into one of the categories listed below. In these cases teams should not establish a separate program of monitoring for this specific matter.

Institutions on the 1992-95 Evaluation Cycles

- The Commission's written materials have made it clear that all comprehensive evaluations will include such a review; *all teams conducting focused visits required by Commission action will also evaluate the institution's progress in responding to the Commission's initiative. The Commission will send a letter informing institutions scheduled for focused reviews that the nature of the focus will be expanded.*
- All evaluation teams, focused or comprehensive, will make recommendations about appropriate Commission monitoring. Some institutions might require no further review; some might be required to file reports; some might require a focused visit. In determining the appropriateness of the monitoring, teams will weigh the impact of the passage of time; that is, institutions visited in 1995 should be in the implementation stage or very close to it.

Institutions Scheduled for On-Site Visits After Spring 1995

- The Commission will develop a list of all affiliated institutions not currently scheduled for any evaluation until the beginning of the 1995-96 cycle. These institutions will be informed by letter that the Commission asks that they submit an institutional plan and/or program sometime before June 30, 1995.

With each Annual Report from 1993 through spring 1995, the Commission will provide a special reminder letter to an institution that has not yet filed that report. (The Commission will be prepared to review reports beginning in January 1992.)

On receipt of the reports, staff together with appropriate Consultant-Evaluators will evaluate the documents and determine whether further information or monitoring is needed. The determination will reflect the passage of time; that is, the closer to 1995, the greater the expectation of more specificity and evidence of implementation.

In the summer of 1995, the staff and appropriate Consultant-Evaluators will review the list of institutions that have not submitted a plan and/or program. They will develop recommendations for Commission action for each institution, with most recommendations requiring the scheduling of a focused visit within the next two years.

Institutions undergoing evaluation in 1990-91 that have not yet received Commission action will be placed on one of the above schedules as a result of that action.

Institutional representatives and C-Es who have questions about the phase-in plan should write or call the Commission staff. ■

Characteristics of a Program to Assess Student Academic Achievement

The following ten characteristics of a program to assess student academic achievement were developed by the Commission's Assessment Project Advisory Committee to provide a guide and stimulus to ongoing discussion and collaboration within and among institutions.

1. Flows from the institution's mission.
2. Has a conceptual framework.
3. Has faculty ownership/responsibility.
4. Has institution-wide support.
5. Uses multiple measures.
6. Provides feedback to students and the institution.
7. Is cost-effective.
8. Does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution.
9. Leads to improvement.
10. Includes a process for evaluating the assessment program.

Commission Statement on Assessment and Student Academic Achievement

The Commission affirms that the evaluation/accreditation process offers both a means of providing public assurance of an institution's effectiveness and a stimulus to institutional improvement. The Commission's criteria require an institution to demonstrate the clarity and appropriateness of its purposes as a postsecondary educational institution; to show that it has adequate human, financial, and physical resources effectively organized for the accomplishment of those purposes; to confirm its effectiveness in accomplishing all of its purposes; and to provide assurance that it can continue to be an effective institution. A variety of assessment approaches in its evaluation processes strengthens the institution's ability to document its effectiveness.

The Commission reaffirms its position that assessment is an important element in an institution's overall evaluation processes. The Commission does not prescribe a specific approach to assessment. That determination should be made by the institution in terms of its own purposes, resources, and commitments. Assessment is not an end in itself, but a means of gathering information that can be used in evaluating the institution's ability to accomplish its purposes in a number of areas. An assessment program, to be effective, should provide information that assists the institution in making useful decisions about the improvement of the institution and in developing plans for that improvement. An institution is expected to describe in its self-study the ways that it evaluates its effectiveness and how those results are used to plan for institutional improvement.

The Commission wants to make clear that all institutions are expected to assess the achievement of their students. With this statement we make explicit the Commission's position that student achievement is a critical component in assessing overall institutional effectiveness. Our expectation is that an institution has and is able to describe a program by which it documents student academic achievement.

*Approved by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - October 27, 1989*

Report on the Assessment Implementation Plan

As reported in the Spring 1991 *Briefing*, the Commission has begun the process of implementing its *Statement on Assessment and Student Academic Achievement*. In addition to the *Briefing*, all affiliated institutions were notified of the implementation plan in a mailing in June that identified which category of the plan applied to each institution.

Institutions scheduled for evaluation after Spring 1995 are required to submit an institutional plan and/or program to the Commission sometime before June 30, 1995. These institutions are currently receiving a special mailing to assist them in preparing their submission. This mailing specifies that all assessment plans submitted should be approximately five to ten pages in length and must address the following Components of an Assessment Plan:

1. the plan is linked to the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution;
2. the plan is carefully articulated and is institution-wide in conceptualization and scope;
3. the plan leads to institutional improvement;
4. the plan is being implemented according to a timeline;
5. the plan is administered.

The mailing includes a reply card requesting that the institutions indicate approximately when their plans will be submitted. These cards will assist Commission staff in developing the process to review the plans. A pilot review process will be conducted in Spring 1992 after the first plans are received.

Institutions and teams involved in comprehensive evaluations in fall 1991 are also receiving a special mailing providing guidance in applying the *Statement*.

Among the materials included in both mailings are "Questions for Institutions Engaged in Developing an Assessment Plan," and "Ten Characteristics of an Assessment Program." These materials and other staff papers form the basis for three new chapters in the next editions of the Commission's *Handbook*, *Guide*, and *Manual*, scheduled to be mailed to all institutions and evaluators in January 1992.

The 1992 Annual Meeting will include a special five-program series devoted to assessment of student academic achievement. Sessions will cover Commission expectations, developing an assessment plan, institution-wide involvement in assessment programs, and two panel presentations offering examples and practical advice. Annual Meeting information will be distributed in mid-November. ■