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 in the areas below:

a. **Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.**
   *(Student outcomes: educational programs)*

b. **Student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs.**
   *(Student outcomes: general education)*

c. **Academic and student services that support student success.**
   *(Student outcomes: academic and student services)*

**Rationale and Notes**

Student outcomes—both within the classroom and outside of the classroom—are the heart of the higher education experience. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support appropriate student outcomes for its educational programs and related academic and student services that support student success. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution is always asking itself whether it has met those goals and how it can become even better.

Even though the concept of institutional effectiveness may not be explicitly referenced in all of the standards, the accreditation process assumes that all programs and services, wherever offered within the context of the institution’s mission and activity, are reviewed as part of the institutional effectiveness process.

When reviewing this standard, peer evaluators will look for evidence of each of the three key elements of the standard, but do so as an integrated activity where the parts are linked. When reporting about the process, it might be useful to consider the process in this fashion:
While the standard emphasizes the three points on the left of the graphic, a thorough explanation of the process will also describe the processes on the right side of the graphic. The institution will not be able to show effective assessment of its outcomes if its means of assessment do not measure what it has set forth as its expected outcomes. Likewise, if the assessment findings are not somehow analyzed or evaluated, it will be hard to show the linkage between undertaking assessments and the continuous improvement of programs and services. Finally, this is a process, and the underlying expectation is that it is ongoing.

NOTES

If there are commonalities in the process by which institutions use student outcomes assessment for institutional improvement across the three elements of this standard, the institution may want to prepare a single preface that could be referenced or hyperlinked from each substandard that outlines the process (organizational structure, timetables, local resources, internal review, etc.). However, review committees will make a separate determination of compliance on each substandard. Because components of the process may differ for each part of the standard, additional content in this Manual will be presented separately for each substandard.

Effective outcomes assessment can be achieved in a variety of ways, and the mentality that “one size fits all” is inappropriate and diminishes the individual missions of institutions. This is especially true regarding the use of language to describe processes; for example, “assessment,” “evaluation,” “goals,” “outcomes,” and “objectives” may have precise meaning to a reviewer, but the institution may have a meaningful effectiveness system even if it is not as precise with its language as the reviewer would like. The institution should develop and/or use methods and instruments that are uniquely suited to its circumstances, and are supported by its faculty and its academic and student support professionals.

At the time of its review, the institution is responsible for demonstrating that the full cycle outlined above has taken place, and that the current process is being used to promote
continuous improvement. For institutions that do not use annual reporting, sufficient cycles of reporting should be provided to establish that the process is applied to all educational programs.

At the time of its review, the institution is responsible for providing evidence of “seeking improvement.” The institution should be using the data to inform changes based on evaluation of its findings. Plans to make improvements do not qualify as seeking improvement, but efforts to improve a program that may not have been entirely successful certainly do.

**NOTE ON SAMPLING**

There is an expectation that an institution is able to demonstrate institutional effectiveness for all its educational programs and related academic and student services. The volume of material represented by this activity can be quite large, especially at larger institutions. To this end, an institution may provide a sampling of the effectiveness of its programs at the time of its comprehensive review. Sampling, for the purpose of accreditation, includes the following three elements:

1. A representation that is mindful of the institution’s mission.

2. A valid cross-section of programs from every school or division (and across all levels), with every major division and level of program represented. Sampling should be inclusive of off-campus sites and distance or correspondence education offerings, as applicable; at a minimum, the institution should clarify that assessment activities are inclusive of these modes of delivery and explain that process.

3. A compelling case as to why the sampling and assessment findings are an appropriate representation of the institution’s educational programs and its academic and student support services. Sampling does not preclude the institution from having effectiveness data/analysis available on all programs and units. It is the prerogative of a SACSCOC committee to conduct a more in-depth review of an institution’s data/findings/analysis on the effectiveness of all its educational programs and its academic and student support services.

8.2.a 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 each of its educational programs. *(Student outcomes: educational programs)*

**Rationale and Notes**

For purposes of this standard, an academic program is a credential as defined by the institution. A degree with a defined major is clearly a program. On the other hand, programs in the same field but
8.2.c 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 academic and student services that support student success. *(Student outcomes: academic and student services)*

**Rationale and Notes**

Academic and student support services that support student success normally include such activities as library and learning/information resources, faculty resource centers, tutoring, writing centers, academic computer centers, student disability support centers, financial aid, residence life, student activities, dean of students' office, and so on. Most institutions would also include admissions offices within this category. These units provide direct support to faculty and students as related to their educational programs, indirect support for student learning, or a specific co-curricular mission that supports the college experience.

It would be common to find that some of these units have expected student outcomes very similar to those of educational programs. Examples might be a library unit tasked with providing information literacy instruction to students, or wellness programming aimed at influencing student behaviors. Regarding library and other learning/information resources, see Standard 11.3 *(Library and learning/information access)*, which specifically addresses instruction in the use of the library. In other cases, expected outcomes might not be related to a directly measurable student learning outcome but instead related to quality of service. An example might be a maximum percentage “downtime” target for levels of academic computing network availability.

As discussed in the “Rationale and Notes” for Standard 7.3 *(Administrative effectiveness)*, it is sometimes difficult to separate assessment of outcomes of administrative goals from assessment of outcomes related to academic and student support services. Generally, these “dual function” units would be addressed in this part of the Principles. If those units are instead addressed in Standard 7.3, it is incumbent on the institution to explain how this determination follows from its mission and organizational structure; it is strongly suggested that this explanation appear in both standards of the Compliance Certification. While institutions may organize functions differently, it is expected that all services, whether administrative or academic student support services, engage in institutional effectiveness processes.

**NOTES**

See the Standard 8.2 discussion as well as this substandard for full coverage of this standard within the Resource Manual.

Often, the nature of academic and student support services differs between services for graduate students and those for undergraduate students. Similarly, some services are geared
toward commuter students and others primarily target residential students. While institutions have moved more services online, making them available to residential, online, and off-campus students, this is not always the case. Institutions should take care to explicitly address how outcomes assessment activities take these (and other) student populations into effect.

Questions to Consider

• Has each unit developed expected outcomes in clearly defined and measurable terms?

• For units that have direct instructional responsibilities, or that provide specific co-curricular activities, are there measurable expected student learning outcomes for these functions?

• What types of assessment activities are undertaken by each unit?

• How (and by whom) are the findings analyzed in order to take possible action on the findings?

• If weaknesses are found, what is the process for seeking improvements in the delivery of academic and student support services? What are some of the efforts made to improve services?

• If the institution used sampling, why were the sampling and findings an appropriate representation of the institution’s academic and student support units?

Sample Documentation

• Information as to how the institution’s academic and student support services units are structured for reporting purposes.

• Specific expected outcomes for academic and student support services units, to include expected student learning outcomes as appropriate.

• Specific evidence of the assessment of outcomes.

• Information as to how findings are analyzed.

• Examples of units seeking improvements based on this analysis.

• If sampling is used, (1) how the sampling is representative of the institution’s mission, (2) documentation of a valid cross-section of units, and (3) make a case as to why sampling and assessment findings are an appropriate representation of the institution’s units.

• Discussion of how assessments address different types of student populations.

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)
CR 11.1 (Library and learning/information resources)
Standard 11.3 (Library and learning/information access)
CR 12.1 (Student support services)