

II.4 Outcomes assessment

The *Standards* and the current accreditation process emphasize ongoing planning, self-evaluation, and the use of program-level outcomes assessment by ALA-accredited programs. Each school and program will have its own ways of expressing its goals, determining desired outcomes, and measuring its accomplishments. The results of developing and evaluating outcomes assessments will be a unique set of measures of what constitutes success for that school and program. Many institutions have tools and resources that departments and programs can use to help develop and measure outcomes. These resources are often available on university websites. An annotated list of selected outcomes assessment and evaluation tools is available on the Office for Accreditation website.

Under the *Standards*, programs should use outcomes assessment as part of the ongoing planning and evaluation process. This process consists of setting a mission, defining goals, enumerating objectives, identifying appropriate measures and benchmarks, comparing what has been achieved to what was intended, and using what is learned to make improvements. Outcomes assessment provides the Program Head and faculty with information to make useful decisions about program improvement and to develop strategies for continuous improvement. These measures indicate how a program's achievements can be assessed, and they also provide evidence that program objectives are being achieved.

The process of outcomes assessment ultimately results in revision of the objectives and goals of a school and program. The outcomes can, and should, affect future decision-making and planning. Effective outcomes assessment means that the school and program have established and use broad-based, continuous program planning, development, assessment, and improvement.

As part of the accreditation process, the program, the ERP, and the COA should ask these questions about outcomes assessment:

- What mechanisms does the program already have in place to measure outcomes?
- What outcomes of the program provide evidence that the program is satisfactorily achieving its objectives?
- What resources does the program use to achieve the objectives of the program, and how are they organized to that end?
- Do the school and program provide reasonable assurance of continued resources and adequate organization so that it can continue to achieve its purposes and continue to conform to the *Standards*?

II.4.1 Sources of data for measuring outcomes

Goals, objectives, and assessment practices should not be so specific and inflexible that the school and program cannot respond to changes or unexpected events. Not all outcomes measures need to be objective or easily quantifiable; they must, however, be verifiable.

Look for outcomes measures first in existing documents about the program, its resources, and its external environment. Examples of sources of data for demonstrating attainment of objectives include student achievements (grades, projects, appointments, awards and recognition, job placements, etc.), alumni surveys, faculty accomplishments, employer feedback, and departmental or program evaluations. Assessment measures for the curriculum come from testing for success in attaining course and program objectives, school objectives, or institutional

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objectives for skills, thinking and practice in the discipline, and preparations for lifelong learning. The development of measures for teaching might begin with answering questions such as: What methods of presentation accommodate various learning styles? How are students encouraged to practice and apply their learning? Resources on systematic outcomes measurement are available on the Office for Accreditation website.