

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES,  
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (ACCJC)

Responses to Questions from the ACCJC Accreditation Standards Symposium  
April 23-24, 2015

*Below find responses to participation questions concerning the Accreditation Standards adopted in June 2014. Also please review the posted slides from the conference, as information from questions answered during presentations is included there.*

**Standard I**

**Standard I.B.1**

Q. Is the term “student learning outcomes” different from “learning outcomes?”

A. Throughout the Accreditation Standards, the terms student learning outcomes and learning outcomes are used interchangeably.

In standard I.B.1, there is a term of “student outcomes” used, to address inclusively student learning and student achievement. Standards I.B.2-6 discuss separately and specifically both student learning outcomes and student achievement in the context of Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness.

**Standard I.B.3 and federal regulations 34 C.F.R. § 602.16(a)(1)**

Q. Does the job placement rate apply to vocational certificates only, or also to degrees such as nursing and teacher training? Does it not apply to liberal arts?

A. College must have institution-set standards and assess program and institutional performance related to job placement rates and licensure examination placement rates (for programs where graduates must complete an examination in order to work in that field) in their vocational/career-technical education programs, commonly referred to as CTE programs. These CTE programs include certificate programs and degree programs, as well as other “programs” defined by the institution.

Colleges must also have institution-set standards and assess performance as to course completion rates. Being mindful that the standards require institutions to have institution-set standards appropriate to their missions, it is assumed that institutions will have additional standards set in a number of other areas. In that vein, a college could include job placement as a measure for all of its programs, if it determines this would be appropriate to determining if it is meeting its mission.

## I.B.6 – Several Questions

Q. Since the California Equity Plan disaggregates data, does that fulfill the disaggregation requirement of the standard?

A. We have seen a number of equity plans, and they have significant variations. As a general practice, it may be useful for an institution to look at all of its plans and reports, to identify synergies in the data gathered and analyses completed.

The Standard asks for disaggregation for subpopulations of students to identify performance gaps related to student learning and student achievement. The institution will want to determine relevant student populations for inclusion in institution-level analysis, and will also likely want to set criteria to aid programs in determining populations of students for analysis at the program level, based upon the institutional mission and programmatic emphases.

Please note that Standard I.B.5, related to assessing accomplishment of the institutional mission, also creates the expectation of disaggregated data for analysis by program type and mode of delivery.

Q. Does I.B.6 apply only to Gainful Employment or CTE programs?

A. No, the standard refers to “the institution” and applies to student learning and achievement gap identification across the institution and in all programs.

Q. Does I.B.6 require disaggregation of student learning outcomes data specifically by demographics including race and gender? What does subpopulation mean—can that mean DE vs online, evening versus day, etc?

Standard I.B.6 does not require disaggregation by specific demographic characteristics. Instead, the institution will want to determine the relevant student populations. The purpose of disaggregation is to provide information that will help the institution examine student learning and student achievement performance gaps and create strategies for addressing those gaps. The identification and disaggregation of relevant student populations should facilitate this work.

Standard I.B.5 addresses disaggregation by program type and mode of delivery.

Q. To what extent should data sets be disaggregated, and in what ways? What data sets did the Commission have in mind when drafting this standard? Are they retention/success oriented or course/program/institutional SLOs?

A. The institution should identify the populations of students, based upon the students it serves, for which to disaggregate data about student learning outcomes and student achievement. Per Standard I.B.5, it should also disaggregate by program type and mode of delivery to assess how the institution is meeting its mission, given the methods by which instructional services are delivered. As mentioned above, it will be helpful for the institution to identify criteria for disaggregation of data within programs, based upon the institutional mission as well as programmatic emphases.

Q. Does the Commission believe that collecting and analyzing disaggregated learning outcomes data, compared to interventions to improve outcomes, actually can be used to evaluate causal relationships?

A. We know there are many factors and causes for why individual students successfully complete classes, leave the institution, do or do not complete degrees or transfer, and why they learn or do not learn something. While there are some factors outside the control of the institution, we also know there are institutional factors (institution-wide, or perhaps only within a single classroom) which can negatively or positively impact multiple students' learning and success. Some of those factors have disparate impact on particular populations of students. The purpose of disaggregated institutional data and analysis is to get to a level of detail that informs institutional choices pertinent to the populations of students it serves and to advancing their success (through strategies and decisions that may apply to them as individuals, as members of an identified group, or as part of the entire student body). Some analysis may prove to be most helpful to a particular department or program, and other analysis may provide institution-wide insight. Whatever the level, data analysis should be used to inform decisions and plans to improve student learning and achievement, and to meet the college's mission.

Q. As to the requirement for disaggregating data on learning outcomes, there are faculty in small programs and researchers who are troubled by the idea of disaggregating data on learning outcomes in small classes—because it starts to get easy to identify students individually. Recognizing this concern, doesn't it make sense to disaggregate at higher levels of power (degrees, or a combination of courses across years)?

A. Principles of good practice would support the expectation that instructors, in every class taught, are looking at the achievement of student learning outcomes at the individual student level, as well as aggregating results. This is an essential aspect of the continuous improvement that education professionals have practiced for many years. It is one reason for the promotion of embedded assignments for SLO practice, used in combination with assessment rubrics. Moreover, effective faculty practice—as instructors, advisors, and department members-- has long included strategies for encouraging student behaviors which can lead to stronger student achievement as well (from attendance and course completion, to program and course selection for certificates, degrees, and transfers, to career planning and preparation).

When it comes to classroom, curriculum, departmental, and institutional planning and resource allocation, there are different levels of granularity which will be useful for decision making. The

conversation at each level should include identification of the data and measures which should influence decisions at that level, and how the necessary level of information availability can be achieved.

The Standards have for years required that institutional credentials be based upon student learning outcomes. As credentials are assigned to individual students, many institutions and systems are realizing the value of accessing certain information at the student level. Of course, just as with any research or provision of services related to individual subjects, there must be scrupulous adherence to the privacy and confidentiality safeguards.

While unspoken in the question, there can be times when concerns about workload, capacity, and accountability of individuals involved in assessment and research come into play. These are appropriate subjects for conversation at the institution, to ensure the focus of data analysis and decisions remains on student learning and achievement.

#### I.C.14

Q. This is a new standard. What are some examples of evidence that could be used to meet this standard?

A. Within complex higher education institutions-- whether private for-profit, private nonprofit, or public—there can be competing values and priorities such as those described in the standard. The statement of purpose at the governing board or institutional level might stress the higher priority of student achievement and student learning than on these other objectives. There may be provisions within the conflict of interest and ethics policies, as well as demonstrated consideration of student learning and achievement in resource and other decision making, which can show the requisite institutional commitment.