

Meeting the Challenge of Outcomes Assessment

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Session Outline

- Introduction
- Context
- Focus on student learning at program level
- Review and analysis of planning programs' definition of learning outcomes
- View from the PAB
- Experience of Iowa State University
- Summing up and thoughts about “meeting the challenge”
- Questions, answers, and discussion

Convenor's Perspective

- 39 years as faculty member in Planning
- 14 years as university liaison with regional accreditation agencies (SACS, WASC)
- 11 years overseeing specialized/professional accreditation and program reviews

Purpose

Accreditation is a means of providing formal recognition that a program indeed measures up to the profession's high educational standards and is therefore qualified to train its future practitioners.

The accreditation program also seeks to:

- Provide assurances to prospective students, employers, and the public-at-large regarding the basic quality of accredited programs;
- Provide schools with an incentive for careful and thorough self-examination, and with constructive recommendations for improvement;
- Provide schools with information on trends and innovations in planning education, using knowledge gained through the ongoing accreditation review process;
- Assist planning faculty and administrators in achieving institutional support for their programs;
- Provide a vehicle for engaging practitioners and academicians in joint and ongoing deliberations regarding the roles, content, and effectiveness of planning education;
- Aid in the process of preparing planners for membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), and assist AICP in evaluating the qualifications of applicants for certification.

ACSP Annual Meeting 2006

Measuring the Quality of Learning: From Inputs to Outputs in Planning Education

Howie Baum

Charlie Hoch

Tara Clapp

David Conn

Regional & Specialized/Professional Accreditation in Transition

Early Nineties - Present

Inputs → Outcomes

Teacher-centered → Learner-centered

Compliance → Improvement →
Improvement & Accountability

Summative → Formative → Both

Drivers for Accountability

- Federal & state politicians (both parties)
- US Department of Education
- Media
- Public at large

- It's the right thing to do??

Outcomes

- Student learning: the heart of the matter
- Productivity (retention, graduation, time-to-degree, etc.)
- Other expectations of a professional program (contributions to the profession, service to the community, etc.)

Assessment Cycle at Program Level

- Define programmatic learning outcomes/objectives
- Ensure alignment with learning outcomes/objectives at other levels (e.g., university, course)
- Seek evidence of achievement (e.g., define performance indicators; seek data)
- Use results for improvement and accountability

Acceptable Evidence of Learning at the Program Level

- Indirect, e.g., student surveys, alumni surveys, exit interviews, etc.
- Direct, e.g., review of student work in projects, theses, internships, etc.; imbedded questions in coursework; comprehensive exams; etc.
 - *intentional*
 - *not grades*
- Direct measures essential; multiple methods preferred

Have We Taken the First Step?

Planning Programs' Definition of Learning Outcomes

Methodology

- Simple question to all departments housing ACSP- accredited planning programs
 - Does your program have student learning objectives or outcomes identified and approved (by your faculty) at the degree program level? Yes/No
 - Separate answers if more than one planning program
 - If answer is “yes,” send copy(ies)
- Analysis
 - Frequencies
 - Adaptation of WASC rubric applied to content

Adaptation of WASC Rubric

Criterion	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
Comprehensive List	List of outcomes problematic, e.g., very incomplete, inappropriate, disorganized.	List includes reasonable outcomes but not specify expectations for program as a whole.	List is well-organized set of reasonable outcomes that focus on key knowledge, skills and values .	List is reasonable, appropriate, and comprehensive.
Assessable Outcomes	Outcome statements not identify what students can do to demonstrate learning.	Most of the outcomes indicate how students can demonstrate their learning.	Each outcome describes how students can demonstrate their learning.	Faculty have agreed on explicit criteria statements such as rubrics.

Findings to Date

Institutions surveyed	75
Responses	52
Institutions reporting learning outcomes defined	36
Institutions providing copies of learning outcomes	31

Preliminary Analysis of Programmatic Learning Outcomes

Institutions sending learning outcomes	Pre-initial	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly developed
31	6	8	13	4	0

Asking Too Much?

- Not asking more of ourselves than we would expect of our students
 - Evidence-driven decision-making
- No need to assess against all learning objectives every year
 - Assessment plan
- Minimize workload, e.g.,
 - Build on existing practices
 - Use sampling techniques
- Make a good-faith effort

