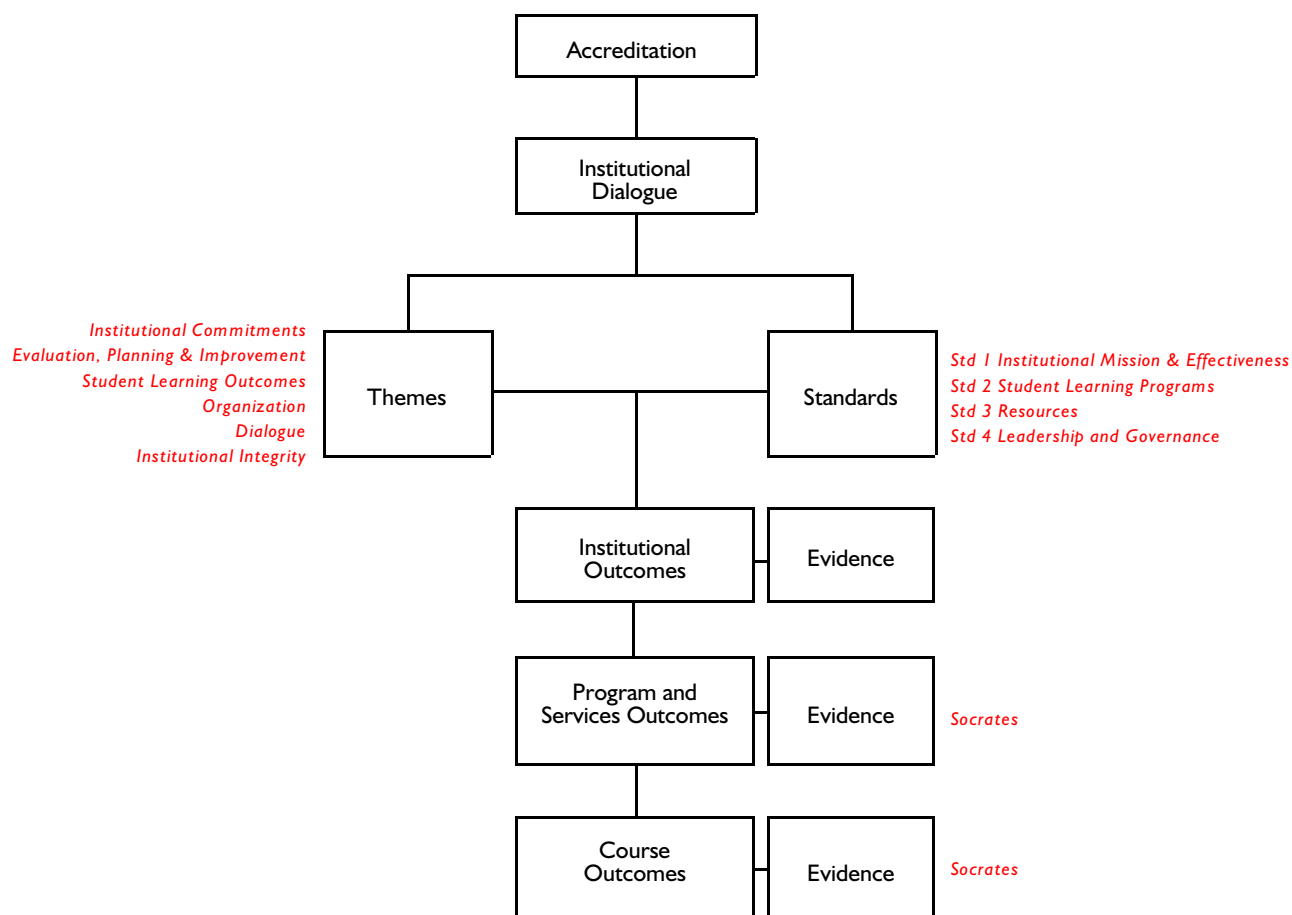


SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE Accreditation and Learning Outcomes

Amid decreasing fiscal and human resources, California community colleges are facing pressures for increased accountability from federal and state governmental agencies, accrediting commissions, and consumers demanding better educated graduates and employees. As such, in 2004, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), the accrediting body for all California community colleges, released updated Standards for Accreditation. These new Standards build on previous standards by adding the requirement that “institutions identify student learning outcomes and measure their achievement as part of institution self-evaluation.” Institutions must now define student learning outcomes, measure student achievement, and use this analysis of student learning to guide institutional improvement efforts.

There are several themes throughout these Standards. These six themes (as shown in the chart below) were designed to provide guidance and structure to self-reflective dialogue and evaluation of institutional effectiveness.



Institutional Commitment focuses on an institutional mission statement that reflects the intended student population and the institution’s commitment to student learning. This mission statement guides institutional action supporting student learning as its primary goal. That is, the entire institution participates in reviewing institutional performance and in developing plans for improvement of student learning outcomes.

The theme of Evaluation, Planning, and Improvement links continuous institutional evaluation with improvement. *Evaluation* focuses on student achievement and learning and the effectiveness of processes, policies, and organization; *Improvement* is achieved through ongoing and systematic evaluation, integrated *planning*, implementation, and reevaluation. In turn, these processes inform college decisions on areas for needed improvement, and resources are distributed in order to implement these needs.

The development of Student Learning Outcomes is one of the key themes in these standards. Institutions must consciously and robustly demonstrate the effectiveness of its efforts to produce and support student learning by

developing student learning outcomes at the course, program, and degree level. These learning outcomes measure and assess how well learning is occurring so that improvements can be made. It requires that faculty discuss ways to deliver instruction to maximize student learning, and that student support staff evaluate the quality of their services for providing students access and movement through the institution. Finally, it requires that student learning outcomes be at the center of the institution's key processes and allocation of resources.

Organization requires colleges to have inclusive, informed, and intentional efforts to define student learning, provide programs and services to support that learning, and evaluate how well learning is occurring. This means the institution must identify and make public the learning outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of programs in producing those outcomes, and make improvements. Although this requirement is not a new accreditation standard, the expectation is that the institution now be oriented to produce and support student learning.

All college constituent groups must participate in inclusive, informed, and intentional Dialogue about student achievement and learning, institutional quality, and improvement. For the dialogue to have its intended effect, it should be based on both reliable quantitative and qualitative information and on interpretative evidence about the effectiveness of the college's programs and services.

Institutional Integrity deals with the institution's demonstrated concern with honesty, truthfulness, and how it represents itself to all internal and external stakeholders. This theme looks at institutional integrity reflected in all its policies, practices, and publications and treatment of students, employees, and the public. It also includes the faculty's honest appraisal of student performances, student honesty, and institutional diversity and equity.

As each community college approaches the implementation of these new Standards, different methodology and approaches are considered, discussed, and developed. No one subject-specific method or single institutional process fits for every discipline or institution. Just as there are many diverse teaching techniques, there are varied means to defining and assessing outcomes in both vocational and liberal arts programs as well as in institutional goals. The Standards concentrate on organized learning environments and experiences **supporting any learning method that works**.

To accomplish this, each area must first re-identify what expected knowledge or skills its graduates should have and then determine how to reliably assess this knowledge or skill. Basic information could be gathered from employers (including those who have hired former students), students themselves, four-year institutions, and experienced resources in the field. Assessment of student learning may then be measured within the classroom setting, and at the conclusion of the course, students would be certified for what they have learned. The certificate or degree would not represent time and credit hours dutifully completed, but would certify that the student had demonstrated attained specified knowledge and skills.

This subject-area and college-wide dialogue have been incorporated in the normal six-year program review process. Currently, each subject area already examines enrollment statistics, teaching strategies, student outcomes, and plans for future improvement of the instructional offerings or student services. Integrating a discipline-specific **learning** experience as the basis for future directions would be appropriate and easily done.

As each discipline reviews and modifies existing curricula, the institution also revises processes, procedures and policies to integrate each recommendation into a master institutional design. Curriculum processes would focus on competencies rather than on established sets of course topics; fiscal resources would be allocated on the basis of implementing different learning outcomes; facilities would be modified to accommodate several and coexisting learning experiences; research data would be gathered and analyzed for information on student success while at the institution and after the completion of program or course work; and, the ability to enhance the learning experience would be an important criterion in faculty evaluation and the hiring process.

The learning emphasis is not difficult, nor will it be instantaneous. Rather, it will be a slow and gradual process of modification and experimentation, with changes affecting the whole institution as well as impacting individual disciplines. Yet, it can be done. Governmental and consumer pressures are gradually forcing all educational institutions to focus on students learning outcomes. Why wait until laws or requirements compel us to make the necessary changes? We can make it happen on our own terms.

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