NOTES ON WASC, ASSESSMENT, & EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

From the WASC 2001 Handbook of Accreditation
www.wascweb.org/senior/handbook.pdf

Educational Objectives
The University

• Has educational objectives (Standard 1.2).
• Aligns objectives with institution’s core purposes (1.2).
• Creates competencies, indicators, & levels of achievement, (1.2, 2.2, 2.6) keeping in mind that “seat time” is not an appropriate measure of how well objectives were met (2.2).
• Competencies must be reflected in the syllabi of General Education and major courses (2.2).
• Degrees are defined in terms of levels of achievement necessary for graduation (2.2).
• Faculty members incorporate the levels of achievement in their standards for evaluating student work (2.6).
• Distributes objectives widely: faculty, students, staff, appropriate community members, etc., know and understand the objectives. A collective vision of educational attainment exists (2.4, 4).
• Gathers evidence regularly to ensure that students develop expected core learning abilities and competencies before they graduate (2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7).
• Involves appropriate stakeholders—alumni, employers, practitioners—in the assessment of educational programs (4.8).

Continual Renewal based on Evidence
The University

• Discusses the evidence on how well objectives are achieved (4).
• Uses evidence to set priorities; and to revise purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning and scholarly work (4.3, 4.6, 4.7).
• Reflects on evidence to modify courses & programs and to improve learning (change curricula and pedagogy, improve evaluation means and methodology) (2, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7).

Evidence provided to WASC should concentrate on what the institution does and how well it does relative to its goals and standards of performance (p. 7-8). In these cases:

Students—Provide evidence on learning objectives, whether performance standards are achieved, where improvement is needed (p. 8).

Faculty—Provide evidence on the effectiveness of the support provided in developing scholarship of teaching and/or moving toward learning-centered institutional approaches (p. 8).

Finances and facilities—Provide evidence on how effectively they are renewed and how they are deliberately deployed to support teaching and learning (p. 8).

Assessment of Learning
Evidence should

• Cover students’ cumulative experience and level of learning at the time of graduation.
• Involve multiple judgments of student performance (e.g., several readers of a portfolio).
• Provide information on different dimensions of performance (e.g., number of different dimensions of performance, aggregated across students).
• Involve more than surveys or self-reports of competence and growth. Surveys reveal how students behave and feel. Also need what and how much students have learned, which is accomplished through gathering and evaluating actual student learning results and reviewing student learning products (p. 8-9).

Common Mistakes

• Measuring everything. Better to measure selectively.
• Being too precise. Better to be as precise as necessary, given the problem or question at hand.
• Premature closure. Better to continue reflection (p. 9).

Good Evidence Is

• Relevant & valid: answers a valid, important question; is related to institution’s stated objectives.
• Verifiable: documentable and repeatable.
• Representative: choose typical cases.
• Cumulative: use multiple sources and methods for corroboration.
• Actionable: appropriately disaggregated; reflectively analyzed and interpreted; used to improve (p. 9-12).