

Appendix A: Guidelines for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The CEA standards—Curriculum 2, Student Achievement 2, and Length and Structure of Program of Study 2—require an alignment of curricular objectives and assessment measures as appropriate to the program’s mission. There must be an obvious link between the stated learning outcomes for the program’s courses and the length and structure of the program of study.

Curriculum Standard 2:

Course goals, course objectives, and student learning outcomes are written and are appropriate for the curriculum.

This standard requires that course objectives, which are based on curricular goals, be complementary across courses and levels of the curriculum and support the mission of the program.

Student Achievement Standard 2:

The program or institution documents in writing whether students are ready to progress to the next level or to exit the program of study, using instruments or procedures that appropriately assess the achievement of student learning outcomes for courses taken within the curriculum.

This standard requires that, using appropriate instruments or procedures, programs document that students are meeting course objectives. To do this, programs must have statements of student learning outcomes, which are based on course objectives. Student learning outcomes must be written, observable, measurable, and show language proficiency expressed in terms of academic readiness or practical applications. (See glossary to the *CEA Standards* for definitions of *course goals*, *course objectives*, *student learning outcomes*, and *proficiency*.)

Length and Structure of Program of Study Standard 2:

The program or institution’s curricular design clearly indicates the levels of instruction and specifies how students progress through a full program of study.

Specific to student progress, this standard requires that programs provide a clear link between the expected and acceptable student learning outcomes of the program’s courses and the program’s length and structure.

It is critical that course objectives and student learning outcomes throughout the program of study represent significant progress or accomplishment. The level of student achievement, which will be measured against student learning outcomes statements, forms the basis of the program’s quality claims (see Student Achievement Standard 2).

Evidence of curricular soundness and appropriate connection to student achievement may be demonstrated by

- student learning outcomes that are directly linked to the mission statement and curricular goals and objectives
- transparent achievement thresholds for progress through the program
- individual language proficiency that can be demonstrated from multiple sources of direct and indirect data.

Keeping in mind the above factors, programs may use evidence, both direct and indirect, to claim that their students are learning. Direct evidence of student learning outcomes, which may be quantitative or qualitative in nature, is provided through sound assessment processes and methods that are designed specifically to demonstrate actual learning in a particular class or level. Indirect evidence of student learning outcomes is provided through processes or methods that imply learning occurred. Indirect evidence can support direct evidence but can never stand alone as evidence of student learning.

The following lists are offered as suggestions to programs of the types of evidence they may use, but evidence is not limited to items on this list. When resources allow, good reliability practice encourages programs to use external reviewers or readers for student demonstrated work (for example, portfolios, tapes, performances, projects, etc.)

Concrete evidence of student achievement and student learning outcomes

(based on documents from the Council on Higher Education Accreditation and Middle States Student Learning Assessment documents)

Direct evidence:

- TOEFL scores and other standardized test scores (placement, exit, or achievement)
- teacher- or program-made tests
- comprehensive exams (teacher-made or institution-made)
- scales
- portfolios
- rubrics
- grades based on explicit criteria related to clear learning goals (not attendance or effort)
- sample course or homework assignments
- term papers and reports
- research projects
- case study analysis
- class discussion participation
- video and audio tapes
- student publications and presentations
- capstone projects
- evaluated performances or projects

Indirect evidence:

- self-reports (student perception/assessment of own learning during a course, program, and/or after program completion)
- GPA
- pass/fail rates
- retention rates
- course evaluations
- test blueprints
- university/college acceptance letters
- job placement/employer ratings
- undergraduate/graduate school placement rates (within institution and compared to peers)
- post-program academic success, such as college and university follow-up
- focus group interviews
- alumni follow-up surveys
- exit surveys
- employer surveys
- student engagement or leadership (i.e., service learning; intellectual, cultural, or athletic activities; mentoring practice; homework)
- other documentation of achieving student goals

Satisfactory student progress

Satisfactory student progress can be difficult to measure and problematic in language learning, which is not simply a linear process of acquiring sequential skills or knowledge. Language learning requires different amounts of time for different learners, depending on educational backgrounds, starting proficiencies, and goals. Nonetheless, programs are called on to demonstrate that students are progressing satisfactorily through a program, based on their attainment of learning outcomes as stated in the curriculum. At the same time, programs need to identify and address the needs of students who are not making satisfactory progress.

CEA believes that determination of satisfactory progress must be measured in relation to program mission and goals. The program has the necessary components for assuring satisfactory student progress if it

- has a curriculum and stated learning outcomes that support the mission of the program
- articulates learning outcomes appropriate to the curriculum
- delivers a program in sessions of appropriate length for the expected learning outcomes
- informs students how they are expected to progress and how they will be assessed
- has an approach to using both direct and indirect evidence of student learning outcomes
- has a clear process for identifying students who are not making satisfactory progress and a procedure for assisting such students to succeed.

Several standards refer in detail to each component above, and the responses to these standards will collectively document satisfactory student progress and demonstrate compliance with the standards involved (Mission 1, Curriculum 3, Length and Structure 2, Student Achievement 3).

Significant progress relative to the norms of the field

Programs accredited by CEA differ significantly in their missions, goals, and structures. Expectations for “significant progress” fall within an expected range for a particular program model (i.e., ESP, EAP, conversation, cross-cultural, etc.). Thus, norms vary based on the particular goals of the program and its learners.

It may be beyond the scope and expertise of individual programs to research and articulate the “norms of the field.” However, programs can demonstrate how their program model fits into current practice and how it compares with similar models through the following kinds of activities:

- conducting action research related to progress through the program
- disseminating through publications and conference presentations current research in the field related to progress and learning outcomes in the IEP setting
- developing professionally through scholarly engagement with current research related to the program model
- evaluating tests and textbooks used by the program and like programs
- encouraging conference attendance and participation
- using texts that are current in the field
- using internal materials that have been analyzed for validity and reliability and, if possible, given external peer review
- demonstrating the process for curricular decisions (textbook selection, curriculum review, faculty involvement) that align with current research and pedagogical practices
- supporting faculty development
- assuring access of faculty and staff to a current professional library and publications
- conducting regular faculty meetings to assure discussion of perspectives informed by the field vis-à-vis methodologies, assessment practices, student learning outcomes, and good practices
- making peer institutional comparisons about
 - what kinds of learning and rates of progress most programs of like model are expecting
 - whether students move through the program within expected time periods
 - how other programs demonstrate progress
 - what expected ranges for rates of retention and graduation are and how the program fits into this range