

Understanding Assessment

Purpose of Assessment: To improve—not prove!

The purpose of assessment is to improve performance. The goal is not to prove how exceptional we are; it is to identify opportunities for further improvement in how we serve our students.

Reasons for Assessment

1. Richland’s Mission, Vision, and Culture of Continuous Improvement

Richland strives *to be the best place we can be* to teach, learn, and build sustainable local and world community. Our reputation for performance excellence is known all over the world; our employees identify our continuous pursuit of excellence as one of our greatest strengths. Assessment is one of the ways we continue to improve our performance.

2. Our Stakeholders

Our students, members of the community, and other stakeholders deserve to know what students will learn, what services we provide, and how well we deliver instruction and services. We assess our performance so that we can communicate how effectively we accomplish our mission to our stakeholders.

3. Accountability in American Education

Accountability is not a passing fad; it is a movement that began in the 1960’s and has evolved over the last 50 years—in the last decade adding a focus on student learning and success. Although robust debate about how assessment for accountability should be conducted continues, organizations of educators, such as the American Federation of Teachers believe that “accountability should be about making sure students have the resources to learn and succeed: rich curricula, excellent facilities, talented—and well-supported—faculty, and robust academic standards that are devised and improved by the people who deliver them” (from www.whatshouldcount.org). We subscribe to this approach, setting standards based on our mission, vision, and values and improving performance on the standards we set for ourselves by some other entity.

4. SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation

Although we set our own standards and use the results to further improve performance, doing so keeps us in compliance with SACS requirements which grew out of the accountability movement discussed above. Nevertheless, SACS *does not* set the standards that we must achieve; they simply require that we assess our programs and services and use the results to implement improvements. The Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards listed below describe what the SACS Commission on Colleges requires of our assessment efforts.

Core Requirement 2.5

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement, and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1

The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.

Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1

The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies.

Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3

The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.

**Assessing Learning Outcomes vs. Assessing Services:
Who Assesses What?**

All instructional units must assess student learning outcomes. Other units who impact student learning also assess student learning outcomes along with assessing the services they provide. We determine which units conduct learning outcomes assessments based on what the department claims in its departmental mission statement.