



RESOURCE MANUAL

for The Principles of Accreditation:
Foundations for Quality Enhancement



Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges

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SECTION 12: Academic and Student Support Services

12.1 The institution provides appropriate academic and student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission.

(Student support services) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

Student success is significantly affected by the learning environment. An effective institution provides appropriate academic and student support programs and services consistent with the institution's mission that enhance the educational and personal development experience(s) of students at all levels; contribute to the achievement of teaching and learning outcomes; ensure student success in meeting the goals of the educational programs; and provide an appropriate range of support services and programs to students at all locations. Qualified and effective faculty and staff are essential to implementing the institution's goals and mission and to ensuring the quality and integrity of its academic and student support programs and services. An effective institution has policies and procedures that support a stimulating and safe learning environment.

Appropriate academic and student support programs and services apply to both undergraduate and graduate programs, although the mix of appropriate services may differ for students seeking degrees at different levels. Similarly, the mix of services may differ by location or mode of delivery. Regardless of the type of student, however, the expectation is that an institution recognizes this important component of student learning and student development, and that, in the context of its mission, the institution provides an appropriate range of support services and programs to all students.

Furthermore, academic support services may be appropriate for faculty as well as students. Testing centers serve both faculty and students, learning resource specialists often offer services for enhancing pedagogy, and instructional technologists support faculty seeking to develop and enhance courses.

The Core Requirement calls for "appropriate . . . programs, services, and activities." When addressing this Core Requirement, an institution needs to see past its own organizational chart and not address just offices or departments. Organizationally, academic and student support services may be housed in academic offices, in student affairs, or administrative offices. Academic support services may include, but are not limited to, academic teaching and resource centers, tutoring, academic advising, counseling, disability services, diversity and inclusion offices, campus ministry, service learning centers, teaching laboratories, career services, testing centers, student life, residence life programming, and information technology. The emphasis should be on aspects of the institution that serve a curricular support or co-curricular function

NOTES

This Core Requirement relies heavily on the professional judgment of those assembling a narrative and those reviewing the narrative. There is a balancing act between too much detail

and not enough. Finding this balance can be helped by recognizing that the standard seeks detail on the appropriateness of the programs, services, and activities—not on the effectiveness of activities. Details on effectiveness and assessment of programs should be in Standard 8.2.c (Student outcomes: academic and student services). However, information from that standard may be useful as evidence of the appropriateness of programs, services, and activities discussed in this standard.

There are separate standards for library and learning/information resources (Standard 11 of the Principles), so that information does not need to be repeated here, with one major exception. As mentioned in this Manual in Core Requirement 11.1 (Library and learning/information resources):

Institutions should include information on learning/information resources housed in the library, other locations, or offered over a network, as appropriate (e.g., curriculum labs, specified reading rooms, computer labs, IT help services, writing centers, online learning management systems). If this information is instead presented in Core Requirement 12.1 (Student support services), that should be clear in the narrative of both standards.

Questions to Consider

- How does the institution's organizational structure affect its delivery of academic and student support programs, services, and activities?
- What is the student body profile and do the institution's academic and student support programs, services, and activities serve all levels of students?
- How do the programs, services, and activities differ between undergraduate, graduate, and professional students?
- How do the academic and student support programs and services effectively promote the mission of the institution?
- How do students taking courses at off-campus instructional sites (including high school dual-enrollment sites) and branch campuses, or taking distance and correspondence education courses, access student support programs, services, and activities?
- What academic support programs, services, and activities exist for faculty?
- How does the institution ensure that its academic support programs and services are adequate and appropriate to the needs of its students and faculty?

Sample Documentation

- Descriptions of the various academic and student support programs, services, and activities.
- Narrative relating the support programs, services, and activities to the mission of the institution.
- Publications and websites (e.g., academic support services) explaining how support programs and services are provided and accessed.

- Data on the frequency of usage of academic and student support services, programs, and activities by students and faculty.
- Surveys indicating that student and faculty needs are being met.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policy: [Distance and Correspondence Education](#)

Cross-References to Other related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 8.2.c (*Student outcomes: academic and student services*)

CR 11.1 (*Library and learning/information resources*)

Standard 12.2 (*Student support services staff*)

Standard 12.3 (*Student rights*)

Standard 12.5 (*Student records*)

Standard 12.6 (*Student debt*)

12.2 The institution ensures an adequate number of academic and student support services staff with appropriate education or experience in student support service areas to accomplish the mission of the institution.
(*Student support services staff*)

Rationale and Notes

Qualified and effective faculty and staff are essential to implementing the institution's goals and mission and to ensuring the quality and integrity of its academic and student support programs and services. In order to carry out such programs and services, the institution is expected to appoint student affairs professionals who have adequate educational training and/or experience to provide these services. Although academic credentials are primary and, in most cases, will be the standard qualification, other types of qualifications may be appropriate. Furthermore, mission-related considerations may affect desired qualifications.

Questions to Consider

- How does providing academic and student support programs and services cut across organizational lines at the institution?
- What are the student support programs and services and how are they staffed?
- What are the qualifications, both academic and experiential, for student affairs and academic support personnel?
- What are the training and professional growth opportunities for student affairs staff?

- What evidence is needed to demonstrate that the staff is sufficient to accomplish the mission?

Sample Documentation

- Roster of academic and student services staff with job duties, academic qualifications, and experience.
- Position descriptions.
- Details related to professional growth and training activities.
- Organizational charts that help demonstrate reporting structures.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 12.1 (*Student support services*)

12.3 The institution publishes clear and appropriate statements of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement(s) to the campus community. (*Student rights*)

Rationale and Notes

Institutions are obligated to develop comprehensive and appropriate policies delineating student rights and responsibilities because students and student learning are central to the institutional mission. To be effective, such policies are clearly written and widely available to the entire community of the institution and need to include procedures for use by students in preserving these rights and responsibilities. While student rights and responsibilities might not be enumerated in a single document, all elements should be easily accessible and should not be contradictory.

NOTE

Institutions may find professional organizations helpful in developing appropriate statements of student rights and responsibilities. See, for example, [NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education](#) and [ACPA—College Student Educators International](#).

Questions to Consider

- Do student rights and responsibilities conform to sound educational practice and meet the needs of all undergraduate and graduate students served by the institution?
- Where are these rights and responsibilities published?

- How is access provided or publicized to those affected by the policies?
- Are there any differences for students based on location or mode of delivery (e.g., dual-enrollment students)?
- How are alleged violations and grievances regarding student rights and responsibilities handled?
- Who is responsible for formulating these rights and responsibilities, approving them, and keeping them updated?

Sample Documentation

- Statement or statements of student rights and responsibilities.
- Details on publication, dissemination, and access for various levels and types of students, including off-campus and distance education students.
- Information regarding channels for approval and review.
- Examples of implementation/enforcement (can be redacted if appropriate).

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policy: [Distance and Correspondence Education](#)

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 10.1 (*Academic policies*)

Standard 12.4 (*Student complaints*)

12.4 The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written student complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be accessed upon request by SACSCOC.

(Student complaints)

Rationale and Notes

Institutional policies and procedures governing written student complaints need to be well publicized and provide clear and consistent guidelines for their resolution. Furthermore, the institution must abide by its own policies, ensuring that student complaints are addressed in a prompt, fair, and consistent manner.

The SACSCOC policy on [Complaint Procedures Against SACSCOC or Its Accredited Institutions](#) states:

[E]ach institution is required to have in place student complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well publicized. SACSCOC also requires, in accord with federal regulations, that each institution maintains a record of complaints received by the institution. This record is made available to SACSCOC upon request. This record will be reviewed and evaluated by SACSCOC as part of the institution's decennial evaluation.

When addressing this part of Standard 12.4, the institution should provide information in its Compliance Certification or Fifth-Year Interim Report describing how the institution maintains its record of written student complaints and also include the following:

- The individuals/offices responsible for maintenance of the record(s).
- Elements of a complaint review that are included in the record(s).
- Where the record(s) is located if centralized, or how records are maintained if decentralized.

One of the main purposes for requiring a record of written student complaints is so that the institution and SACSCOC can review the record to see if there are patterns. If a pattern of student complaints is found when reviewing the record, and if those complaints are related to SACSCOC accreditation standards, then SACSCOC will expand its review to include those issues if the complaints point to an unresolved problem. Thus the record of student complaints should be maintained in a manner consistent with this intended purpose of the standard.

It is expected that institutions will provide at least one redacted example of a written complaint and documentation of its resolution in its response.

Questions to Consider

- How does the institution define a “written student complaint”?
- What are the policies and procedures governing written student complaints, and are they adequate to meet the needs of the students?
- How are the policies and procedures governing student complaints disseminated?
- Are there any differences in policies based on location or on mode of delivery?
- How was the policy approved and how is it revised if necessary?
- Are the publicized policies and procedures consistently followed when resolving student complaints?
- Where and how does the institution retain a record of student complaints?
- Is this record kept in a way to be able to discern if there are patterns in the complaints received?

Sample Documentation

- Policies and procedures for addressing written student complaints.

- Details on where the policies and procedures are published and efforts taken to ensure students, faculty, and staff are aware of the policies.
- An example of a written student complaint resolution (with sensitive information redacted).
- A description of how the institution maintains a record or records of written student complaints that includes :
 - The individuals/offices responsible for maintenance of the record(s).
 - Elements of a complaint review that are included in the record(s).
 - Where the record(s) is located if centralized, or how records are maintained if decentralized.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policies: [Complaint Procedures Against SACSCOC or Its Accredited Institutions Distance and Correspondence Education](#)

This standard requires a policy or procedure; see Appendix A of this document for implications. See also:

SACSCOC Good Practices:

[Developing Policy and Procedures Documents](#)

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 14.5 (*Policy compliance*)

12.5 **The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records and maintains security measures to protect and back up data.** (*Student records*)

Rationale and Notes

The security and confidentiality of student records is critical to the integrity of the institution. This standard acknowledges the institution’s responsibility to oversee the release and use of all student records and institutional data with personally identified information and identifies four key aspects of that responsibility: security, confidentiality, integrity, and data protection and backup. As applied to this standard, integrity means to ensure that the records are not changed without appropriate oversight and sufficient security measures. Special security measures emphasize the imperative for the institution to protect confidentiality, preserve the integrity of its students’ academic records and data,, and oversee the release of records in accord with state and federal mandates and commonly accepted standards and practices among institutions of higher learning.

Questions to Consider

- What types of student records does the institution store?
- What are the definitions, policies, and procedures governing the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records? How does the institution ensure that it adheres to these policies and procedures?
- How does the institution manage the physical security of record storage?
- How does the institution manage the security of electronic data storage systems, paper storage, and/or other storage?
- What is the institution's disaster plan for records retrieval?
- How does the institution ensure that faculty and staff understand and carry out the commitments to confidentiality, integrity, and security of student academic records?
- Are there special circumstances that affect records (e.g., an early college high school where student age may be an issue)?
- What training is required for those with access to student records?

Sample Documentation

- The policies and procedures governing student records, their security, integrity, and confidentiality, their use, and their release.
- Security measures adopted by the institution that apply to the protection and backups of data.
- Publications used by students and personnel that:
 - Discuss student academic records, including statements addressing confidentiality of student records.
 - Identify specific policies for the security of records and include statements about physical security of records, storage of records, backup of records in both electronic and hard copy, receipt of course grades, issuance of transcripts, etc.
- Documentation that faculty and staff are trained regarding policies on the confidentiality, integrity, and security of student records.
- Documentation of data backup procedures.
- Procedures for response to security breaches.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policy: [Distance and Correspondence Education](#)

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 10.6 (*Distance and correspondence education*)

12.6 The institution provides information and guidance to help student borrowers understand how to manage their debt and repay their loans.
(Student debt)

Rationale and Notes

In order to address the national increase in student loan debt and loan default rates, this standard requires that institutions provide information and guidance to help student borrowers better understand how to manage their debt and repay their loans. The standard focuses on providing financial management information and guidance to student borrowers. The standard expects institutions to ensure that students are appropriately informed of the obligations associated with debt and repayment of student loans.

NOTE

This standard applies to all institutions, whether or not they participate in federal loan programs.

Questions to Consider

- What programs and activities are in place at the institution to provide information and guidance to students relating to financial management, especially managing debt?
- To whom are these programs and services offered?
- Is student participation voluntary or mandatory?
- What materials are used?
- What offices on campus are responsible for providing this information and guidance?
- If online resources are used, is there an option for students to seek additional assistance?

Sample Documentation

- Details on financial management information and guidance offered to students.
- Sample materials used in programs and services related to this standard.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 13.6 *(Federal and state responsibilities)*