

ACCE Guidance Committee

Best Practices Task Force

Best Practice No. 3 (July 2008)

Possible Weakness / Undeveloped Potential

“Program lacks a fully implemented outcomes assessment plan”, “Program has outcomes assessment plan in place but it is lacking key elements”, “Outcome assessment program lack key measures that indicate fulfillment of stated program objectives”, “Outcome assessment plan is in place although there is no evidence of cyclical feedback and improvement steps taken due to that feedback”

Justification

The ACCE mandates that programs have an academic quality plan identifying the process used for the continuous improvement of the construction education program. (Section IX - Standards). This plan should identify measurable indicators of academic quality in the construction program on a cyclical basis in order to measure progress towards stated outcomes. Historically, this has been an area of difficulty for many programs. Fifty programs were evaluated by the ACCE from February 2002 through July 2005. Of the 50 Visiting Team reports from this period, 33 cited weaknesses attributed to the “Program Quality and Outcome Assessment” section of the ACCE standards.

The Basics of Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment is performed to systematically improve the quality of your program. In the most basic sense, it consists of setting outcomes (i.e. “goals”) for your program, collecting feedback from a various constituents (students, employers, advisory board, alumni, etc.), analyzing the results, and making improvements where indicated (i.e. program adjustments) based upon this analysis. The process will contain a variety of inputs and should be performed on a scheduled and continual basis. It is important to remember that this is your program’s outcome assessment plan – one size does not fit all. With that being said, there are common elements of all comprehensive assessment plans. The following items may be of help in developing a plan:

Define Terminology. Many assessment plans use different language to describe the same thing. The ABET model uses the term “Educational Objective” to

describe expectations of a graduate several years after graduation. ABET uses the term “Learning Outcomes” to describe what a student should know/be able to do upon graduating. The learning outcomes for students will have “Performance Criteria” associated with them which are measurable.

State/Develop the Program Mission. Each construction program must have a mission as referenced several times throughout the ACCE Standards. The program’s mission is served by the outcomes that you will develop. Without a coherent mission statement students, faculty and others will not know the purpose of the program or, worse yet, have different ideas of the purpose.

Identify/Develop Program Objectives and Outcomes that are both clearly stated and measurable. Outcomes may focus on what you want students/graduates to be able to do, the competencies they attain as they complete the program. An example might be “Graduates of this program will be able to effectively communicate”. Objectives are typically statements that describe expectations for graduates somewhere in the future, maybe 3 years after graduation. While the outcomes developed will likely be tied to those of the department/college/university, the assessment plan that you are building is for the construction program. Data collected on “communication effectiveness” must focus on graduates/students of the construction program and not just be college/university-wide. Determine how the identified outcomes will be assessed. What assessment tools will be used? Surveys, portfolios, focus groups, and certification exams are some of the assessment methods available. Who will participate in assessment? Remember that a program has many constituencies including students, graduates, advisory board members, employers and the community.

Create the assessment plan. Write out the plan so that others are aware of it and so that it can be modified as the years go on. Determine a schedule for this assessment. Remember your plan is the cornerstone of quality improvement and, as such, must be a continual and cyclical process. Some assessment items will be performed every year (i.e. exit surveys of students ready to graduate) but other items may be performed every couple of years. The key is that assessment must be continual so that a program can compare performance after changes have occurred to performance prior to those changes.

Implement the Assessment Plan. Collect data on the extent to which program outcomes are being achieved.

Analyze the results of this assessment. The plan should state who will perform this analysis, and how the program assessment will be meshed with college/university-wide assessment activities. How will the results be disseminated? Assessment results and their dissemination should be documented.

Program Modifications based on the Results. Document changes made based on the evidence collected. This is important! Track future data to determine if modifications led to improvement. In some cases, program outcomes may have to be adjusted.

Suggested Reading/Resources

The ABET web site found at <http://www.abet.org/assessment.shtml> has very good information. For a general overview of the assessment process, see the PowerPoint show under the “Assessment of student learning outcomes” link on this page.

This is a document produced by the University of Central Florida with valuable information and additional resources. http://oeas.ucf.edu/doc/acad_assess_handbook.pdf

This document provides a “template” for program assessment that is used at Wright State University. http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/plans/temp_gloss.doc

This document provides another glimpse at a “template” used by the University of Alaska Anchorage. Click on the templates link on the left. <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/assessment/>

Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. Jossey-Bass. 2004.