

14. Policy on Student Achievement and Satisfaction

This Policy sets forth the Accrediting Commission’s definitions, interpretations, and expectations of what constitutes compliance with Standard V, Student Achievement and Satisfaction. This Policy provides a general overview on how the Accrediting Commission and its on-site evaluators will apply and judge evidence presented by postsecondary institutions to demonstrate “acceptable student achievement and satisfaction.”

Institutions are expected to have in place a formal written and actively executed plan for conducting student achievement and satisfaction studies in order to show compliance with Standard V.

Each institution is required to submit data that demonstrate acceptable student achievement and satisfaction, including data from student surveys, completion/graduation rates, placement rates, and/or licensure exam pass rates—where appropriate—in its Self-Evaluation Report and its Annual Report to the Accrediting Commission.

The Commission expects each institution to demonstrate acceptable student achievement and satisfaction based on valid and reliable assessment techniques, when possible. To this end, the institution will collect and analyze relevant data and use them to demonstrate compliance with Standard V. The evidence that **must** be provided by the institution to the Commission is described below. For additional information, please see D.7. Q&A on Standard V – Outcomes Assessment found on DETC’s web site (Member Services and Evaluator’s Documents).

The Background of and Reasons for the Policy

Public and government concerns with the “outcomes” of education in recent years have led to increased emphasis on ways that institutions can demonstrate accountability.

For many years, DETC required that institutions have an ongoing procedure to demonstrate that a satisfactory percentage of students have (1) attained the required learning outcomes, and (2) been successful in achieving the benefits established for a course or program. Institutions have had to show that a high proportion of students are satisfied with the educational services provided, and that a satisfactory percentage of enrolled students finish the course.

With the increased interest in outcomes and accountability, the Accrediting Commission determined that it needed to have a sharper focus on this issue. It wanted to use more specificity for what constituted “satisfactory” and “acceptable” ratings used to measure its long established outcomes standards. The Commission launched a process to evaluate what had to be done to refine and strengthen its approach to outcomes assessment in this era of accountability.

This process has resulted in three major additions to the current standards for student achievement and satisfaction. A priority sequence for outcomes measurement has been established, which ranks in descending order three different ways of measuring learner achievement.

The Priority Sequence

Here, in descending order of importance, is the sequence for demonstrating outcomes attainment:

1. **Outside independent assessments.** When these are available, they constitute clear targets for the educational process and form the major part of any measure of student achievement. The classic example is a course designed to prepare the student to pass a licensing examination. The “pass rate” of students provides an ideal measure of the effectiveness of such a course.

In any case where the outcome of a course is demonstrable through performance on outside assessments, institutions will be expected to provide any data available to them that shows this outcome. In these cases, student performance will be the Commission’s primary focus in assessing achievement of the course objectives and learning outcomes.

The graduates’ success in passing outside independent assessments must be equivalent to other appropriately accredited education providers that are similar in nature and level.

There are other, less formal indicators that still have the credibility of an outside assessment. Successful completion of an educational course can lead to promotions within the field or occupation, favorable comments from supervisors, or successful performance of new tasks. Clearly, indicators like these are not as persuasive as performance on specific third-party tests, but they are not controlled by the institution or student and thus will have particularly strong credibility with the Commission.

2. **Professed student satisfaction.** Although outside assessments are the most preferable indicator of the achievement of outcomes, many programs are offered for which these assessments are simply not available. In these cases, the standards must rely on an element within the educational process. In light of the maturity of distance education students and the reasons they give for enrollment, and drawing on the experience of the past half-century, the Commission will use the overall assessments made by the students taking the course as the primary indicator of student success and satisfaction.

A standard part of DETC accreditation has been an evaluation of student responses to survey questions designed by the Commission. Students in DETC-accredited institutions fit a profile, and most are older and perform roles other than that of student. They are the best judges of whether the program delivered what it promised, and their verdict will play a major role where outside, third-party assessments are not available.

The new focus builds on the former procedure in two ways. First, questions designed to elicit the measure of satisfaction will be asked of some students every year, rather than only at five-year scheduled reaccreditation reviews. Second, a baseline has been established. The Commission has developed three questions to be asked of randomly selected students. For each course or program offered by an institution, three of every four students responding to a random survey must answer positively about their experiences.

In cases where the portion of the responding students reporting satisfaction with the experience is less than 3/4th (or 75%), the institution must then provide an explanation for the deviation. If the Commission’s analysis does not show that the institution’s data compare favorably with those of similar DETC-accredited institutions, the institution must provide a written explanation, and the Commission will review the institution’s explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include (1) accepting the institution’s explanations and taking no further action; (2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, (3) ordering the institution to undergo a full accreditation review, and/or (4) withdrawing accreditation if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

3. **Completion rates.** These numbers show how many students were able to complete a course of study and pass all assignments and assessments required by the institution. Although these rates have long been included in DETC accreditation decisions, the nature of distance education and its students make them a less useful indicator of course

outcomes than they may be in traditional education. Where adult students are responsible for their educational choices, they may decide that their personal goals have been reached before completing the course. Open enrollments, and “study anytime” opportunities result in noticeably lower completion rates for distance education. Institutions offering identical courses in both resident and distance modes report consistently lower graduation rates from the distance education offerings, and over the years many fine institutions of unquestioned effectiveness have demonstrated that high student success can exist alongside low course/program completion/graduation rates.

For these reasons, completion/graduation rates will be examined as part of the general review of the institution rather than as a primary indicator of outcomes. These rates will now have benchmarks designed to identify areas in need of Commission attention. DETC members will be assigned to one of several peer groups, dependent upon whether the courses are educational, vocational, or avocational, the level of degree or credential offered, and other factors. A benchmark completion rate representing the average completion rate of all programs in the peer group will be determined for each peer group. Courses with completion rates within 15 percentage points of the mean for the group will be considered in compliance with the standard.

If the Commission’s analysis does not show that the institution’s data compare favorably with those of similar DETC-accredited institutions, the institution must provide a written explanation, and the Commission will review the institution’s explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include (1) accepting the institution’s explanations and taking no further action; (2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, (3) ordering the institution to undergo a full accreditation review, and/or (4) withdrawing accreditation if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

The Standards for Student Achievement and Satisfaction

Accrediting Standard V addresses three specific areas:

A. Achievement of Student Learning Outcomes and Benefits: *The institution articulates student learning outcomes independent of delivery method, has a systematic and ongoing process for assessing student learning, and provides documented evidence that shows that the results are used to improve programs, curricula, instruction, faculty development, and services.*

B. Student Satisfaction: *The institution documents that students are satisfied with the instructional and educational services provided.*

C. Progress Through the Course/Program: *The institution documents that students complete their studies at rates that compare favorably¹ to those of courses/programs offered by similar DETC accredited institutions.*

¹ “Compare favorably” means each course/program completion/graduation rate is within 15 points of the mean for courses/programs at similar DETC institutions (see further discussion below).

The Commission defines “**outcome**” as a specified knowledge, skill, ability, or attitude that a student has achieved as a result of taking a course or program. A “**student learning outcome**” is a particular/specified level of knowledge, skill, and ability that a student has achieved as a result of his/her engagement in a particular/specific instructional experience or set of instructional experiences.

Please note that the term “**completion**” refers to completing a course, and the term “**graduation**” refers to completing an entire program consisting of several courses, such as an academic degree, e.g., Associate’s,

Bachelor's, Master's, or First Professional degree. A “**course**” is defined as units of learning activities that result in the award of a diploma, certificate, or academic credit when completed.

A. Achievement of Student Learning Outcomes and Benefits

Outcomes Assessment Plan: When an institution undergoes its initial or re-accreditation examination, it must provide in its Self-Evaluation Report both a **formal written plan** for regularly conducting student learning outcomes assessment for all of its courses/programs and **documentation that it follows the plan**. Each accredited institution must confirm that it meets this requirement by initialing the appropriate statements in “Section II. Certification of Compliance with Commission Requirements” in its Annual Report to the Commission.

The institution must demonstrate and document in its SER that students achieve learning outcomes that are appropriate to its mission and to the rigor and depth of the degrees or certificates offered. The institution must also describe how its outcomes assessment plan has contributed to the improvement of the institution over time and explain how the plan demonstrates that the institution is fulfilling its stated mission.

“Assessment” is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. When developing an outcomes assessment plan, an institution should consider: 1) what it wants students to be able to do or know, 2) how it knows they can do it or know it, and 3) how it will use the information received to improve teaching and learning. The plan should begin with a solid set of learning goals and outcomes that are quantifiable, realistic, and measurable.

Student Learning Outcomes

When specific learning outcomes are published for a course or program, the institution must provide evidence documenting that its graduates have achieved those outcomes.

A “student learning outcome” is a particular/specified level of knowledge, skill, or ability that a student has achieved as a result of his/her engagement in a particular/specific instructional experience or set of instructional experiences.

An effective assessment plan should specify the targeted audience (i.e., students, graduates, and stakeholders), define and identify the learning goals and outcomes, and be anonymous and formative.

The institution's formal written plan should describe the different areas assessed, the methods of assessment and when they are used, and how it interprets and uses the results. The Tables on page 9 and 10 of this document are provided to suggest some possible resources for methods of assessment and when they can be used. Institutions should tailor the data shown in the sample tables to fit their method of assessment and interpretations for their institution's courses and/or programs.

When specific benefits for a course or program are explicitly promised, the institution must provide evidence documenting that the graduates attain the benefits. “**Benefits**” are anything that contributes to an improvement of a condition. Benefits resulting from enrolling and/or completing a course/program could be obtaining a job, changing a career, getting a promotion or raise, improving job skills, obtaining credentials, qualifying for professional license, or providing personal satisfaction.

Evidence of any benefits promised for taking a course or program may be in the form of institution-administered surveys of students, graduates, employers, registrars at other institutions, and other groups with direct knowledge of the students' abilities or skills. If a benefit is promised for a course or program, such as “earn a job promotion,” the institution must present evidence that a satisfactory percentage, i.e., a majority, of graduates have attained the

promised benefits. The institution must describe how its outcomes assessment plan has contributed to the improvement of the institution over time and explain how the plan demonstrates that the institution is fulfilling its stated mission.

Attainment of Benefits

When specific benefits for a course or program are promised to prospective students, the institution must document that a satisfactory percentage of graduates actually attain the benefits. The Commission defines “**benefit**” as anything that contributes to the improvement of the graduate or his or her status. Benefits from completing a course or program can include such items as increased knowledge, career promotion, salary increase, improving a skill, qualifying for a new job, or personal satisfaction.

Evidence of the attainment of any benefits promised for taking a course or program may be in the form of institution-administered surveys of graduates, employers, registrars at other institutions, and other groups with direct knowledge of the students’ abilities or skills. If a benefit is promised for a course or program, such as “earn a job promotion,” then the institution must present evidence that a satisfactory percentage of graduates have attained that benefit.

The graduates’ success in passing outside independent assessments must be equivalent to other appropriately accredited education providers that are similar in nature and level.

B. Student Satisfaction

The Commission defines “**student satisfaction**” as evidence presented by an institution that shows that the students and graduates of the institution have expressed their overall satisfaction with the courses and services as they have experienced them.

Student satisfaction can range from whether the course materials were current and comprehensive to whether grading services were prompt and fair and if faculty members have performed adequately. Student expressions of satisfaction are normally attained through institution surveys, but an institution can also gather and present data such as unsolicited testimonials, referrals of other students, and repeat enrollments in new or subsequent courses.

The students’ expression of their own satisfaction is another form of evidence used to document outcome achievement. The institution must provide evidence that demonstrates that students are satisfied with the instructional and educational services provided. It must provide evidence in its Annual Report by reporting the following data. In addition, an institution undergoing initial or re-accreditation must also provide evidence in its Self-Evaluation Report.

To measure student satisfaction, the institution must survey the students in each of its courses. When reporting information to the Commission in its Annual Report, an institution will be asked to report the number and percentage of “Yes” responses to the three questions below from 10 of its most popular courses (as defined by number of enrollments). If an institution has more than one division, e.g., vocational and/or degree granting, it must choose 10 courses from each division.

A “**course**” is defined as units of learning that result with the award of a diploma, certificate, or academic credit when completed. Examples of course titles are, “Jewelry Design,” “American History,” or “Business Management.”

The institution **must** include in its surveys the following **three questions** and use the “Yes-No” response. The questions are worded so that they apply to students who have dropped out, are still studying, or who have completed the course/program:

1. Did you achieve, or will you have achieved upon completing your studies, the goals you had when you started this course or program?
2. Would you recommend these studies to a friend?
3. All things considered, were you satisfied with your studies with us?

The minimum acceptable “Yes” response rate is that three of four responders (or 75%) must answer “Yes” to **each** of the three mandatory questions.

The institution may determine the time frame for collecting the survey data. The institution will be asked annually to provide a sample of the surveys used and a description of how they were conducted. The description should include the name of all 10 courses, the time frame used to collect the data, and the number and percentage of “Yes” answers to questions 1, 2, and 3 above.

Example of Survey Data

An institution offers a course in Business Management. During the calendar year 2002, the institution sends a survey that includes the three mandatory questions to the 700 students who enrolled in the course that year including those students who dropped out (110), those who complete the course (400), and those still studying (190). The institution received 10 surveys stamped as undeliverable, which makes the Survey Sampling 690 ($110 + 400 + 190 = 700 - 10 = 690$). The institution received 210 completed surveys, which makes the Return Rate 42% (210 divided by $690 = .304$ or 30%). Of the 210 completed surveys received, 200 answered “Yes” to question 1; 189 answered “yes” to question 2; and 205 answered “yes” to question 3. Along with a sample of the survey, and a description of the survey method, the institution would send the following information to the Commission in its Annual Report:

Name of Course: Business Management	
Time Frame of Survey Sample: 1 year (2002)	# and % Answering “Yes” to question 1: 200 or 95%
Survey Sampling: 690	# and % Answering “Yes” to question 2: 189 or 90%
Number of Completed Surveys Received: 210	# and % Answering “Yes” to question 3: 205 or 98%

If the percentages of those answering “Yes” to any of these questions are below 75%, the institution must provide a written explanation, and the Commission will review the institution’s explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include (1) accepting the institution’s explanations and taking no further action; (2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, (3) ordering the institution to undergo a full accreditation review, and/or (4) withdrawing accreditation if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

C. Progress Through the Course/Program

The institution must demonstrate that students complete their studies at rates that compare favorably to the rates of students enrolled in similar courses/programs offered by similar DETC-accredited institutions. The Commission defines “compare favorably” as meaning completion or graduation rates that do not fall below 15 percentage points of the mean completion or graduation rate for similar courses or programs at similar DETC institutions. The Commission will collect, analyze and compare the data from the institution’s Annual Report or Self-Evaluation Report, and notify the institution if it falls below the 15 point limit.

For an institution undergoing initial or re-accreditation, the Commission staff will provide the on-site evaluators with the data from similar courses/programs offered by similar DETC-accredited institutions in order to help them determine if it meets Standard V.C. The evaluators will also consider the data provided in the institution’s Self-Evaluation Report when making their determination.

For the purposes of calculating the completion and graduation rates, the term “**completion**” indicates that a student completed an individual course or semester, while the term “**graduation**” means that a student completed the entire degree program. A “**course**” is defined as units of learning activities that result in the award of a diploma, certificate or academic credit when completed.

The institution must collect completion data on each course and graduation data on each degree program. When reporting information to the Commission in its Annual Report, an institution will be asked to report completion data on 10 of its most popular courses (as defined by number of enrollments). If an institution has more than one division, e.g., vocational and/or degree granting, it must choose 10 courses from each division. If the institution offers degrees, **it must also supply graduation data for each degree program** (see below).

Completion Data for Courses or Semester:

The institution must collect and report the following data for the courses or semester specified above:

- Name of Course(s)
- Unit of Measurement
- Date of Sample
- Number of Students in Sample
- Number of Cancellations (see below for definition)
- Number of Active Students in Sample
- Students Completing
- Completion Rate

To determine the “Unit of Measurement,” an institution should consider how a student enrolls in a course or program. The unit of measurement should be based on the segment of curricula a student is contracted to pay for (what he or she signed up for and are financially committed to according to the contract). If it is by semester in a degree program, then the institution should use a semester (specify the number of credits, usually 15) as the unit of measurement to determine the completion rate.

The institution should select a random sample of names of people who started the course/semester, i.e., submitted at least one lesson, and track them for a determined time. The institution should select enough names so that it ends up with at least 100 randomly selected people who completed the course/semester. To determine the time frame, the

institution should allow enough time so that the last student who enrolled in that course/semester has had enough time to complete it. For example, if it normally takes a student one year to complete the course/semester, then go back one year and select randomly 100 names prior to that date.

To calculate the “Completion Rate,” take the number of students who completed the course/semester and divide it by the number of people who enrolled (**do not** include those who dropped during the 5-day cancellation period, those who never submitted any required assignments/examinations, those who were cancelled by the institution for non-payment, or those who never provided the required information to be enrolled in the course such as not providing official transcripts. To report the “**Number of Cancellations**,” count those people who dropped during the 5-day (or the amount of time specified) cancellation period, those who never submitted any required assignments/examinations, and those who were cancelled by the institution for non-payment and/or non-compliance.

Example for Course/Semester Completion Rates

An institution offers a course in “Computer Technology.” It normally takes a student 12 months to complete this course. If today’s date were January 2002, the institution would select the first 150 people who enrolled in the course before January 2001. Tracking the 150 people selected showed that 10 people dropped the course during the 5-day cancellation period, 15 people never submitted any assignments or examinations (non-starts), 20 people were cancelled for not paying, and 5 people were disenrolled for never providing the institution with an official transcript. This leaves 100 active students. Of the 100 active students, 30 are still enrolled and 70 completed the course. To calculate the completion rate, take the number of student who completed the course (70) and divide it by the number of enrolled students (100), which gives you a completion rate of 70%.

People who enrolled:	150
People who cancelled before 5-days*:	- 10
People who never submitted exams*:	- 15
People who institution cancelled for non-payment*:	- 20
People who were in non-compliance*:	- 5
Active Students:	100

Students who completed course:	70
Divided by 100 (active students) =	70%

*All of these equal “cancellations.”

For this course, the institution would provide the following information:

Name of course: Computer Technology	*Number of Cancellations: 50
Unit of Measurement: 24 months	Number of Active Students in Sample: 100
Date of Sample: January 1, 2000 – January 2002	Students Completing: 70
Number of Students in Sample: 150	Completion Rate: 70%

Completion Data for Degree Programs:

Each institution must collect and report the following data for its academic degree programs:

- Name of Degree
- Years to Complete
- Years in Sample
- Number of Students in Sample

Number of Active Students in Sample
 Students Graduating
 Graduation Rate

Depending on the number of students enrolled in each degree program, the institution should select a random sampling. The sampling should include enough students to give a true picture of the graduation rate for the program. The institution should select, randomly, sample names of people who started the degree program, i.e., submitted at least one lesson/course, and can be tracked for a determined time. The institution should randomly select an appropriate number of students (at least 25%, not to exceed 100) who completed the program. To determine the time frame, the institution should allow enough time so that the last student who enrolled in that program has had enough time to complete it. For example, the 2001 DETC survey of its accredited degree-granting institutions showed that the average time it took for students to complete an Associate degree was 3 years, a Bachelor’s 4 years, and a Master’s 3 years.

To calculate the “Completion Rate,” take the number of students who completed the program and divide it by the number of people who enrolled (**do not** include those who dropped during the 5-day cancellation period, those who never submitted any required assignments/examinations, those who were cancelled by the institution for not paying, and those who never supplied the appropriate information to be properly enrolled in the program.)

Example of Graduation Rate for a Degree Program

An institution has had 80 enrollments in its MBA program since it began 5 years ago. Since it normally takes three years to complete a Master’s degree, the institution randomly selects 25% of those enrolled in the entire program or 20 students who enrolled at least 3 years ago. For this example, the institution selects a date of January 1998. Tracking 20 randomly selected students from the time they enrolled until January 2001, the institution determines that 1 student cancelled within 5 days, 2 students never submitted any work and 2 students were dropped due to lack of payments. This leaves 15 active students. During this time, 12 students graduated with MBA degrees. To calculate the graduation rate, take the number of students who completed the entire program (12) and divide it by the number of actives students (15), which gives you a graduation rate of 80%.

For the example, this is how the number of active students was determined:

People who enrolled in degree program:	20
People who cancelled before 5-days:	-1
People who never submitted exams:	-2
People who were cancelled for non-payment:	<u>-2</u>
Active Students:	15

The institution would provide the following information:

Name of Degree: MBA Program	Number of Active Students in Sample: 15
Average Time to Complete Program: 3 years	Students Graduating: 12
Date of Sample: January 1, 1998 – January 2001	Graduation Rate: 80%
Number of Students in Sample: 20	

Other Information Considered

In determining whether an institution undergoing its initial or re-accreditation meets Standard V, the Commission also considers the direct evidence of the results of its own mail survey of students using the “DETC Student Survey Form.” An institution must submit 100 names/labels with their application form. If an institution has more than one division, e.g., vocational programs and academic degrees, it must submit 100 names for each division.

The on-site evaluators and the Commission will review the student surveys to evaluate the institution’s performance. The survey results from the Commission-administered student survey will be compared to those of institution-administered surveys to establish the validity of the institution’s survey results.

The Commission will also consider evidence from: (1) analysis of student complaints received about the institution, (2) information solicited in a survey that the Commission sends to state and federal agencies, consumer agencies, and Better Business Bureaus, and (3) any other data or information it encounters about the institution, regardless of its source.

If an institution feels that it cannot adequately and fairly fulfill the reporting requirements as described in this Guide, it may suggest other ways of providing evidence that it meets Standard V. The Commission will make a determination on a case-by-case basis if the institution’s methods of providing evidence are acceptable for meeting Standard V.

For institutions undergoing initial or re-accreditation, the Commission will also consider the results of the Commission-mailed survey of students using the “DETC Student Survey Form” (see Appendix G.1.) when determining whether an institution meets Standard V. The on-site evaluators and the Commission will review the student surveys to evaluate the institution’s performance. The survey results from the Commission-administered student survey will be compared to institution-administered surveys to establish the validity of the institution’s survey results.

The Commission will also consider evidence from: (1) analysis of student complaints received about the institution, (2) information solicited in a survey that the Commission sends to state and federal agencies, consumer agencies, and Better Business Bureaus, and (3) any other data or information it encounters about the institution, regardless of its source.

Commission’s Review

The Commission will review the data supplied in the institution’s Annual Report and will compare the completion and graduation rates with similar institutions offering similar courses/programs. To make the comparison, the Commission staff will determine which institutions and programs are similar. For institutions undergoing initial or re-accreditation, the on-site evaluators and subject specialists will review the information in the Self-Evaluation Report and make the comparison with Commission-supplied data.

To be considered a “favorable comparison,” a course or program must not fall below **15 points** of the **mean completion rate** for similar course or program at a similar DETC institution.

The graduation rates for degree programs will be compared to the mean graduation rate of the similar courses/programs offered by the group.

If the Commission’s analysis does not show that the institution’s data compare favorably with those of similar

DETC-accredited institutions, the institution must provide a written explanation of its data and how they were gathered and the Commission will review the institution's explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include (1) accepting the institution's explanations and taking no further action; (2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, (3) ordering the institution to undergo a full reaccreditation review, and/or (4) withdrawing accreditation if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

Conclusion

The Accrediting Commission will judge the acceptability of the case an institution makes for meeting Standard V by looking at all of the evidence and the thoroughness, clarity, and adequacy of the documentation presented in the Self-Evaluation Report and Annual Report.

When an institution is undergoing its initial accreditation or re-accreditation review, the on-site evaluators will review and evaluate the information provided by the Commission and by the institution against the minimum levels of acceptance described above. They will also determine if there are any extenuating circumstances that should be considered in the case of an institution whose performance falls below minimum acceptable levels.

If the Commission's analysis shows that the institution's outcomes data do not meet the prescribed minimum acceptable levels, the institution must provide a written explanation and the Commission will review the institution's explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include (1) accepting the institution's explanations and taking no further action; (2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, (3) ordering the institution to undergo a full accreditation review, and/or (4) withdrawing accreditation if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

Evidence provided by the institution must be relevant, verifiable, representative, and cumulative. It may not be modified to produce a desired outcome. Hence, the **burden of proof is always on the institution** to show how its evidence meets Standard V.

When an institution believes that it operates under conditions where assessing outcomes can be achieved more accurately by using standards other than those listed in this Policy, it may petition the Commission for a variance. Where the Commission believes that any such variance or reinforcement of the established standard will improve the assessment of objectives and outcomes, it will grant a variance. When an institution believes that it operates under conditions where assessing outcomes can be achieved more accurately by using procedures other than those listed in this Guide, it may petition the Commission for a variance. Where the Commission believes that any such variance or reinforcement of the established standard will improve the assessment of outcomes, it will grant a variance.

Sample Contents of an Outcomes Assessment Plan.

Item	Elements
Overview	Why the plan is written; what it seeks to accomplish or its purpose; who is responsible for implementing plan; principles of learning assessment; implementation timeline; review of plan
Assessing Student Achievement	
Introduction	Overview
Identifying Program and Course Objectives	Define and identify the learning goals and outcomes; identify what the students will be able to do or know; and identify how this is determined
Outcomes Measurement Tools	Lesson exam grades, final exam grades, final course grades, GPA, written projects, projects, internships, transfer of credits; third-party administered test scores; certifications
Review of Student Achievement Results	Data that demonstrates that students are achieving learning outcomes that are appropriate to the institution's mission; data demonstrates as to the rigor and depth of the degrees, diplomas, or certificates offered
Reporting Student Achievement Results to DETC	Report any third-party assessment results, such as test scores on industry examinations or certifications as compared to national average scores, etc.
Using Student Achievement Results to Improve the Institution	Revise as needed to improve outcomes.
Assessing Student Satisfaction	
Introduction	Overview
Student Satisfaction Measurement Tools	Student surveys, unsolicited testimonials; referrals; repeat enrollments; few student complaints; end of course evaluation; graduation survey
Review of Student Satisfaction Results	How often tools are reviewed; who is responsible; what are the benchmarks?
Reporting Student Satisfaction to DETC and Other Agencies	Surveys of 3 mandatory questions must be reported to DETC in Annual Report each year due January 31st
Using Student Satisfaction Results to Improve the Institution	What happens when the percentage of "yes" to the 3 questions falls below 75%?
Assessing Progress Through the Course/Program	
Introduction	Overview
Collecting Data Related to Progress through the Course/Program	Course completion data, program graduation data, time to complete a course, credentialing
Review of Progress Data	What happens when a completion rates falls below a certain percent?
Reporting Data to DETC	Report completion and graduation rates to DETC in Annual Report each year due January 31st
Using Progress Data to Improve Institution	Revise or terminate courses with low completion rates.
Improving the Institution through Outcomes Assessment	How will the institution use this information to improve teaching and learning, as well as student services, etc.?
Instructional and Educational Support Services	Review and revise as needed.
Program Objectives and Curriculum	Review and revise as needed.
Course Objectives, Content, Instructional Materials, and Assessments	Review and revise as needed.
Institutional Policies and Procedures	Review and revise as needed.
Institutional Mission, Goals, and Objectives	Review and revise as needed.
Attachments:	
Areas Assessed and Methods of Assessment and When it is used	See sample of Table A below.
Methods of Assessment and How Institution Interprets and Uses Results	See sample of Table B below.

Table A – Areas Assessed and Methods of Assessment and When It is Used (Suggested Approach)

Areas Assessed:	Method of Assessment and When It is Used:
Basic Skills (<i>reading, writing, math computing</i>)	standardized tests; pre- and post-test; passing a course; portfolio at end of course; thesis; examinations
Competencies (<i>critical thinking, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, problem-solving, etc.</i>)	completion of course/program; “C” or better in required courses; standardized tests; comprehensive examinations; thesis; skill check list; survey of graduates; employer surveys; internships; capstone projects; portfolio; critiques
Disciplinary Knowledge	completion of course/program; standardized examinations; final research paper; evaluation by instructors; capstone project; final project; portfolio, thesis; employer survey; grad school admissions; performance on national, state-mandated, comprehensive, standardized, and/or graduate examinations.
Technical/Professional Skills	national licensure or board examinations; exhibitions or performances; completion of course requirements; practica, internships; skills check list; capstone project; portfolios; written evaluations at end of each course; comprehensive examination; survey of graduates; survey of employers; final grades
General Education	course completion; test at end of courses; pre- and post-test; portfolio; review of student input form; survey of graduates; capstone project; student survey; course embedded assessment
Interdisciplinary Knowledge	course completion; grades in courses; competency examinations; papers, tests, seminars; portfolios; capstone project; projects; thesis; critiques at end of each course; graduate school admission; evaluation of performance; faculty assessment
Values	required courses; alumni survey; assessed within context of internship; end-of-course survey; capstone project; ethics-intensive courses; portfolio; final thesis; student development outcomes survey

Table B – Methods of Assessment and How Institution Interprets and Uses Results (Suggested Approach)

Method of Assessment:	How Institution Interprets and Uses Results:
Standardized Tests	results used for admittance into programs; placement in appropriate course level; results used to test out of required subject
Professional Certification Exams	used to award certification by third-party; results used for job attainment or advancement; program evaluation; curriculum improvement
Surveys (students, graduates, employers)	determine satisfaction; determine baseline indicators; determine relationship between workplace demands and “class” learning; sometimes used in institutional planning; not shared widely
State/National Licensure Exams	results used to improve curriculum; to compare performance to program objectives and learning outcomes; results shared with faculty and reported to Accrediting Commission
Portfolios	results used to chart student progress; to adjust the curriculum; to certify competencies for professional expectations; results are shared with department
Course Completion	number of students completing course; results reported to Accrediting Commission
Capstone Courses/Projects	student performance is compared to expected levels of performance by the Instructors; determine if required/expected learning outcomes have been achieved; results are not shared
Internships/Field Experiences	field-sponsors’ comments improve program as results are shared with faculty
Projects/Theses	used to specify students’ strengths and weaknesses; results discussed in Department; help determine if learning goals and outcomes can be applied
Examinations	used to assess achievement of learning outcomes; used for competency based assessment; used to revise curriculum; results reported to faculty
Grades	used to inform students of performance in courses; used to establish GPA and determine membership in honor society; used to award honors at graduation; used for transfer of credits; results shared with faculty and students
Classroom Assessment Techniques	used to evaluate and enforce learning on day-to-day basis
Student Evaluations	used by individual faculty member to revise pedagogy; results reported to Accrediting Commission
Transfer of Credits	used to admit student into program; used to place student in appropriate grade level; used to assess knowledge
Job Attainment, Promotions or Salary Increases	used to evaluate acceptance and application of knowledge and skills learned
Standards set by Accrediting Body or National Advisory Board	results used to compare against similar accredited institutions; results are shared with faculty to revise curricula