



Community College Survey
of Student Engagement

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC) ACCREDITATION TOOLKIT

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

Using CCSSE for Accreditation

Assessment of student learning outcomes, and to a lesser extent of overall institutional effectiveness, has several major implications for community colleges. Among these are the relationship of assessment results to local and state accountability initiatives and statewide performance indicators and performance-based funding schemes. Perhaps the most salient and certainly the most immediate for most institutions, however, is the degree to which progress on assessment and use of assessment results will affect the institution's prospects for reaffirmation of regional accreditation.

—Seybert, J.A. (2002). Assessing student learning outcomes. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 117, 55-65.

The accreditation process for institutions of higher education has begun to change. No longer is it enough for colleges and universities to list the resources, or inputs, provided to students at their institutions. Instead, accrediting bodies increasingly are asking for evidence of outcomes—what students believe, know, and are able to do because of their interactions with the institution. “Student learning” has become the buzzword in discussions on institutional improvement plans and self-evaluation activities and the focus of all regional accreditation processes.

With this focus on student learning, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) can be a vital tool for community and technical colleges in each stage of the accreditation process. Many colleges have already begun to rely on CCSSE data to demonstrate their commitment to student learning, student success, and institutional improvement. Community colleges have long distinguished themselves through their efforts to put students first and their emphasis on teaching and learning, and CCSSE data highlight these efforts by capturing how students engage in learning and what they perceive they are getting out of the process.

Whether developing the framework for a self-study or providing evidence to visiting teams, college leaders can use CCSSE results to supplement other assessment data in order to more fully depict student experiences and more effectively target improvement activities. Multiple administrations of CCSSE over time can also reveal trends at an institution that would support long-term self-studies and self-evaluation, showing the college's commitment to continuous improvement. With CCSSE's benchmarks, colleges can measure their own progress over time on key components of student engagement as well as compare their performance to that of similar institutions. The benchmarks also help institutions decide where more institutional attention could be focused to increase student learning and persistence, grounding improvement plans and institutional changes in data.

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“In virtually all accredited colleges and universities, the single most important lesson faculty and administrators have learned from that exercise is that goals and objectives need to focus on students, on what students will be able to demonstrate that they know, believe, and can do, and not on what the institution or its faculty provide or offer for students.”

—Lopez, C.L. (2002). Assessment of student learning: Challenges and strategies. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

Of course, since community colleges have missions and goals unique to the communities they serve, there is no universal model for including *CCSSE* data in the accreditation process. Each college will find that the extent to which it draws upon *CCSSE* data throughout each accreditation activity will be unique to its needs and circumstances. However, there are some similarities in the ways colleges are using *CCSSE* data to prepare for accreditation, and these insights may be useful as other institutions begin to draw upon *CCSSE* results to support their accreditation activities.

CCSSE & Regional Accreditation Timelines

No matter where an institution may find itself in the accreditation process, its *CCSSE* results can be highly informative in documenting student learning efforts. For example, *CCSSE* findings can be used to establish the context and specific goals and outcomes of the review cycle in the Institutional Proposal; to document a college's "Commitment to Capacity" in the Preparatory Review, including providing additional research to the team of evaluators during the site visit; and to review the design and results of institutional efforts to evaluate program effectiveness in the Educational Effectiveness Review. *CCSSE* results can also assist institutions in documenting a continued focus on student learning in sustaining initiatives and recommendations resulting from the review process over the ten-year accreditation period.

Example of Administering *CCSSE* in a Regional Accreditation Timeline

ACCJC – 6 year cycle

Year 1: Register for *CCSSE* Administration by November; Administer *CCSSE*, March/April; Receive Institutional Report by July 31

Year 2: Analyze *CCSSE* results; Incorporate into Self Study; Accreditation team visit

Years 3-6: Register for & Administer *CCSSE* a second time to demonstrate review/change based on site team's recommendations; Preparation of the midterm report

Timeline for CCSSE Administration on a 6-Year Accreditation Cycle

With the accreditation cycle occurring over a six-year period, it may be wise to administer *CCSSE* multiple times between reviews. Multiple years of *CCSSE* results allow institutions to establish a reliable dataset. Once a baseline is set, institutions can assess student engagement every few years to measure progress against each benchmark of effective educational practice. This administration cycle thus maximizes the use of *CCSSE* data for an institution's accreditation activities.

Colleges can also use multiple years of *CCSSE* data as evidence of their efforts to track institutional effectiveness over time and uncover gaps and trends in student success. After obtaining results and implementing the findings into the institution's quality enhancement efforts, another *CCSSE* administration two to three years later would help reveal changes made in institutional performance. This data would show the institution's efforts to sustain initiatives and recommendations leading to institutional improvement and greater levels of student learning and success.

When and how often a college administers *CCSSE*, though, depends upon the unique mission and goals of each institution and the challenges it faces. In some instances, budget restraints might restrict an institution from administering *CCSSE* as often as would be desirable. Whatever the numbers of years of *CCSSE* results an institution can obtain, the significance of the data lies in its use in informing college planning efforts

and in documenting institutional performance and progress.

“Having abundant resources does not guarantee effective learning. As college costs have skyrocketed, and demands for nearly-universal student access to higher education have become more pronounced, the questions asked of colleges by consumers and lawmakers have become more strident: ‘What are students learning? Is it the right kind of learning? What difference are you making in their lives? What evidence do you have that you’re worth our investment?’”

—Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2003). *Regional accreditation and student learning: Principles for good practices.* Philadelphia, PA: Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

ACCJC Accreditation Standards

II.A.2.c.
High-quality instruction and appropriate breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning characterize all programs.

When reaffirmation of accreditation is a pressing priority

While ideally the first administration of CCSSE would be done three to five years before preparing for an accreditation review, CCSSE data can still provide some valuable information to institutions with a shorter reaffirmation timeline. One year of CCSSE results can be used to substantiate institutional effectiveness efforts, provide baseline data for the Institutional Proposal, and highlight an institution’s strengths and weaknesses. Subsequent administrations of CCSSE can then be used to demonstrate commitment to program effectiveness requirements. Remembering the CCSSE timeline is important, though: institutions must register for CCSSE by November, the survey is administered each spring in March and April, and the institutional report is delivered no later than July 31st.

Aligning CCSSE to your Accreditation Standards

Aligning ACCJC accreditation standards with the individual CCSSE items shows an institution exactly where CCSSE data can inform the documentation of student learning efforts at the college for each step of the reaffirmation process. Individual CCSSE items, as well as overall benchmark scores, especially when linked to other college student learning measurements, can be used as evidence of the institution’s fulfillment of specific ACCJC criteria. For example, a college could draw upon student responses to how often they had serious conversations with students of a different race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values (survey items 4s and 4t), and the extent to which they felt the college encourages contact among students of different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (9b) to show the institution’s responsiveness to increasing diversity in society (ACCJC Standard II.A.3.c. and II.B.3.d.). The institution could also report its score on the Support for Learners benchmark as evidence of student support programs, services, and activities promoting student learning at the institution (ACCJC Standard II.B.3.). Effective uses of CCSSE data will be tailored to each institution’s unique mission and improvement plans, and thus the CCSSE items focused on by colleges will naturally vary from one institution to the next.

CCSSE Survey Items

Active and Collaborative Learning

ACCJC Criteria

- 4a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions II.A.2.d.
- 4b. Made a class presentation II.A.2.d.
- 4f. Worked with other students on projects during class II.A.2.d.
- 4g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments II.A.2.d.
- 4h. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- 4i. Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course II.A.2.d.
- 4r. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)

Student Effort

**ACCJC
Criteria**

- 4c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in II.A.2.c.
- 4d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources II.A.2.c.
- 4e. Come to class without completing readings or assignments
- 6b. Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment
- 10a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework, or other activities related to your program)
- 13d. Frequency of use: Peer or other tutoring II.B.3.a.
- 13e. Frequency of use: Skill labs II.B.3.a.
- 13h. Frequency of use: Computer lab II.B.3.a.

“An institution-wide dialogue must be at the heart of the self-evaluation process for the college community to gain a comprehensive perspective of the institution.”

“Introduction to the Accrediting Standards” ACCJC/Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Academic Challenge

**ACCJC
Criteria**

- 4p. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations II.A.2.c.
- 5b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory II.A.3.b.
- 5c. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways II.A.3.b.
- 5d. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods II.A.3.b.
- 5e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations II.A.3.b.
- 5f. Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill II.A.3.b.
- 6a. Number of assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings II.A.2.c.
- 6c. Number of written papers or reports of any length II.A.2.c.
- 7. Mark the box that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college II.A.2.c.
- 9a. Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying II.A.2.c.

“Accreditation holds us together through the participation of thousands of colleges and universities in a similar accreditation review process. Even more important, accreditation holds us together through the core values on which it is built and which it reflects: the centrality of institutional mission, the autonomy of our institutions and the academic freedom of our faculty.”

Student Faculty Interaction

**ACCJC
Criteria**

- 4k. Used email to communicate with an instructor
- 4l. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- 4m. Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor ... II.B.3.c.
- 4n. Discussed ideas from your readings with instructors outside of class II.A.2.d.
- 4o. Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance II.A.2.d.
- 4q. Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework

--Judith Eaton, President, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). (October 19, 2005). The best in the world? Part 2. *Inside Accreditation*, 1(3).

Support for Learners

ACCJC Criteria

9b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college	II.B.3.a.
9c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, racial or ethnic backgrounds	II.B.3.d.
9d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	
9e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially	
9f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education	
13a. Frequency: Academic advising/planning	II.B.3.c.
13b. Frequency: Career Counseling	II.B.3.c.

“Evidence of student learning is derived from multiple sources, such as courses, curricula, and co-curricula programming, and includes effects on both intentional and unintentional learning experiences. Evidence collected from these sources is complementary and portrays the impact on the student of the institution as a whole.”

—Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2003). *Regional accreditation and student learning: Principles for good practices*. Philadelphia, PA: Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

ACCJC Accreditation Standards

II.B.3.b.
The institution provides an environment that encourages personal and civic responsibility, as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all its students.

Other Survey Items Relevant to ACCJC Criteria

ACCJC Criteria

4j. Used the internet or instant messenger to work on an assignment	II.A.3.b.
4s. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity	II.B.3.d.
4t. Had serious conversations with students who differ from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	II.B.3.d.
8a. Participation in: Internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	II.A.1.a.
8b. Participation in: English as a Second Language course	II.A.1.a.
8c. Participation in: Developmental/remedial reading course	II.A.1.a.
8d. Participation in: Developmental/remedial writing course	II.A.1.a.
8e. Participation in: Developmental/remedial math course	II.A.1.a.
8f. Participation in: Study skills course	II.A.1.a.
8h. Participation in: College orientation program or course	II.A.1.a.
8i. Participation in: Organized learning communities (linked courses/ study groups led by faculty or counselors)	II.A.1.a.
9g. Using computers in academic work	II.A.3.b.
12a. Acquiring a broad general education	II.A.3.a.
12c. Writing clearly and effectively	II.A.3.b.
12d. Speaking clearly and effectively	II.A.3.b.
12e. Thinking critically and analytically	II.A.3.b.
12f. Solving numerical problems	II.A.3.b.
12g. Using computing and information technology	II.A.3.b.
12h. Working effectively with others	II.A.3.c.
12j. Understanding yourself	II.B.3.b.
12k. Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds . .	II.B.3.d.
12l. Developing a personal code of values and ethics	II.A.3.c.
12m. Contributing to the welfare of your community	II.A.3.c.
13j. Frequency of use: Transfer credit assistance	II.A.6.a.
13k. Frequency of use: Services for people with disabilities	II.B.3.a.

CCSSE in Action: Institutional Examples

As more and more colleges participate in CCSSE every year, there are an increasing number of institutions searching for ways to blend their institutional CCSSE results into the accreditation process. While these efforts have varied according to the unique missions and goals of each institution, many have been very successful in using CCSSE to document and encourage student learning on their campuses. The following section provides a few examples of how colleges are using CCSSE data to promote student learning throughout the accreditation review process.

“Why would you go through a whole renewal process that doesn’t essentially change your institutions for the better? The creation of a quality plan is a dynamic process. You have to engrave it into the DNA of your organization. It takes what used to be a burden (the endless accounting/checklist mentality) and moves into a much more vital way of running the institution.”

*--Bill Law, President,
Tallahassee Community
College*

Hawaii Community College (HI)

Research Capacity for Assessing Student Learning

Hawaii Community College (HCC), a small suburban institution, adopted CCSSE in response to self-study recommendations from WASC to strengthen the use of research in assessing and improving student learning outcomes in educational programs and student services (WASC standard 4.5). In the *Midterm Accreditation Report*, CCSSE was cited as a key component of the college’s data capabilities. HCC uses CCSSE results as a point of reference against which other external and internal research data is compared, directly informing the college’s strategic planning process.

Tallahassee Community College (FL)

CCSSE and a QEP Focused on Student Engagement

Tallahassee Community College’s (TCC) QEP focuses on student engagement in learning directly through infusion of higher order thinking skills across the curriculum and by fostering the development of learning communities that address student needs along a continuum from novice to experienced learners. The large suburban college’s plan is composed of three student success strategies: teaching and learning, early intervention, and communication and collaboration. To measure each of these strategies, TCC draws upon multiple years of CCSSE data. For example, the college looks at student responses to how often they received prompt feedback (oral or written) from instructors (4o), how often they skipped class (4u), and how much time they spent in a typical week preparing for class (10a) in order to plan and monitor early intervention efforts. TCC also plans to use items from the active and collaborative learning benchmark to focus its improvement plan efforts and increase student engagement and learning across the institution.

CCSSE & Accreditation: Some Tips

Here are some tips for institutions working through the accreditation process. As described below, CCSSE data can be used in a variety of ways to support and document an institution’s improvement efforts. The key to using CCSSE results is to see them as an indicator of students’ involvement in educationally purposeful activities and as a way of understanding how students’ experiences reflect the institution’s effectiveness in meeting its unique mission and goals.

The more CCSSE data can be linked to specific goals and initiatives of an institution, the greater power these data will hold in demonstrating institutional improvement and student learning possibilities.

Tip #1: CCSSE items can provide an institution with data on how well it is fulfilling its mission. Many of the items, for example, reveal student perceptions of how experiences at the college have contributed to their knowledge and personal development. Additional items highlight students' experiences with support services provided by the institution. An institution's CCSSE results can therefore help demonstrate achievement in fulfilling its institutional mission and strategic goals.

Tip #2: The results from a CCSSE administration are practical in nature and can inform an institution's improvement efforts. Student responses to items on the survey, especially when compared to the national benchmarks, can reveal areas where the institution is highly successful in promoting student learning and areas where more focus on student success could be given. This means CCSSE findings can be used to back up initiatives and programs implemented by the college.

Tip #3: The more widely an institution shares its CCSSE data, the greater the role the findings can play in informing the accreditation process institution-wide. A broad exposure to CCSSE benchmarks, for example, can provide individuals and departments with common terminology as they prepare accreditation documents and reports. Many areas, such as the advising department or the learning center, will also find that some survey items add additional insight into students' experiences with their services and processes.

Tip #4: The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) is another tool that can enhance an institution's understanding of the student learning experience on its campus. The CCFSSE captures the perceptions of faculty members on how engaged students are at their respective institutions. Together, these two measurement tools can illuminate areas where faculty and student perceptions align and areas where more discussion could be useful in exploring why student

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions Principles for Good Practices

I. What an accrediting commission should reasonably expect of an institution:

1. *The centrality of student learning in its mission.* The institution defines educational quality—one of its core purposes—by how well it fulfills its declared mission on student learning.
2. *Documentation of student learning.* The institution demonstrates that student learning is appropriate for the certificate or degree awarded and is consistent with the institution's own standards of academic performance. The institution accomplishes this by:
 - a. Setting clear learning goals that speak to both content and level of attainment;
 - b. Collecting evidence of goal attainment using appropriate assessment tools;
 - c. Applying collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of the evidence; and
 - d. Using this evidence to improve its programs.
3. *Compilation of evidence.* The institution derives evidences of student learning from multiple sources, such as courses, curricula, and co-curricular programming, and includes effects of both intentional and unintentional learning experiences. Evidence collected from these sources is complementary and demonstrates the impact of the institution on the student.
4. *Stakeholder involvement.* The collection, interpretation, and use of student learning evidence is a collective endeavor, and is not viewed as the sole responsibility of a single office or position. Those in the institution with a stake in decisions of educational quality should participate in the process.
5. *Capacity building.* The institution uses broad participation to reflect upon student learning outcomes as a means of building a commitment to educational improvement.

and faculty perceptions differ. The discussions stimulated across campus can also further inform institutional actions and reflections associated with accreditation.

Tip #5: As the student body at community and technical colleges becomes increasingly more diverse, institutions and accrediting bodies are realizing the importance of developing institutional environments that support diversity among students, faculty, and staff. CCSSE includes multiple items that focus students' experiences in interacting with people from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. The results from these items can assist an institution in measuring the extent to which its students are influenced by institutional efforts to value the student diversity at the college.

Acknowledgement: CCSSE gratefully acknowledges the many benefits realized through its ongoing partnership with the National Survey of Student Engagement at Indiana University Bloomington. The CCSSE Accreditation Toolkit is based in part on previous work by the NSSE staff.

“The real challenge of accountability ultimately to be faced is to ourselves and to our students. Following this premise, the essential future task for self-regulation is to help render what we actually do in our institutions consistent with what we historically have said we believed in. We know that the actual content of accreditation standards has had far less to do with the effectiveness of the process, where it has worked, than the consistent actions of campuses and review teams to find truth and improve effectiveness.”

—Ewell P.T. (1994). A matter of integrity: Accountability and the future of self-regulation. *Change*, November/December 1994, 25-29.