Questions to Use in Institutional Evaluation

This Guide is designed to provoke thoughtful dialogue and judgment about institutional quality by college communities engaged in self evaluation and by external evaluation teams assigned to affirm the quality of institutions. As either group seeks to evaluate an institution’s ability to meet the Accreditation Standards, inquiry — asking questions and seeking answers — is necessary before judgment is made. The following questions are designed to provoke thoughtful reflection about institutional quality and may be asked by either the institution engaged in self-reflection for self evaluation, or by the External Evaluation Team that visits the college. The Guide also provides a list of possible sources of evidence that can be used to develop answers to the questions raised through the process of inquiry.

The questions, and lists of possible evidence, are designed to inform discussions of student achievement, such as number of graduates, number of transfer students, retention rates, course completion rates, job placement rates; institutional performance such as the presence and effective use of institutional resources, structures, and policies, to achieve the institutions educational mission; and student learning outcomes such as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that the institution intended students to learn and which are defined by the institution as the intended learning outcomes. There may be many other questions that institutions and team members can and should ask in order to assess institutional quality and effectiveness.
B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness

The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to produce and support student learning, measures that learning, assesses how well learning is occurring, and makes changes to improve student learning. The institution also organizes its key processes and allocates its resources to effectively support student learning. The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by providing 1) evidence of the achievement of student learning outcomes and 2) evidence of institution and program performance. The institution uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning.

1. The institution maintains an ongoing, collegial, self-reflective dialogue about the continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes.
   - How has the college structured its dialogue? How well does the college embrace and understand the purpose of the dialogue?
   - When, how, and about what subjects has the college engaged in dialogue? What impact has the dialogue had on student learning?
   - Does the dialogue lead to a collective understanding of the meaning of evidence, data, and research used in evaluation of student learning?

2. The institution sets goals to improve its effectiveness consistent with its stated purposes. The institution articulates its goals and states the objectives derived from them in measurable terms so that the degree to which they are achieved can be determined and widely discussed. The institutional members understand these goals and work collaboratively toward their achievement.
   - What criteria does the college use to determine its priorities (set goals)?
   - Is there broad-based understanding of the goals and the processes to implement them? Is there institutional commitment to achieve identified goals?
   - How well does the college implement its goals?
   - Are goals articulated so that the institution can later determine the degree to which they have been met?
   - To what extent does the college achieve its goals?
   - What evidence is used to demonstrate progress toward achieving college goals?

3. The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding the improvement of institutional effectiveness in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation,
implementation, and re-evaluation. Evaluation is based on analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.

- To what extent does the institution understand and participate in ongoing and integrated planning?
- Does the college have a planning process in place? Is it cyclical, i.e., does it incorporate systematic evaluation of programs and services, improvement planning, implementation, and re-evaluation? How does college budgeting of resources follow planning? How is planning integrated?
- To what extent are institutional data and evidence available and used for planning? Are data analyzed and interpreted for easy understanding by the college community?

4. The institution provides evidence that the planning process is broad-based, offers opportunities for input by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

- What mechanisms exist for participation in college planning?
- How is broad involvement guaranteed?
- To what extent does the college allocate resources to fulfill its plans?
- When resources to fulfill plans are not available, does the college identify and follow strategies to increase its capacity, i.e., seek alternate means for securing resources?
- What changes have occurred as a result of implemented plans?

5. The institution uses documented assessment results to communicate matters of quality assurance to appropriate constituencies.

- What assessment data does the college collect?
- By what means does the college make public its data and analyses internally and externally?
- How does the college assess whether it is effectively communicating information about institutional quality to the public?

6. The institution assures the effectiveness of its ongoing planning and resource allocation processes by systematically reviewing and modifying, as appropriate, all parts of the cycle, including institutional and other research efforts.

- What processes does the institution use to assess the effectiveness of its cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation implementation, and re-evaluation?
- How effective is the college planning process for fostering improvement?
7. The institution assesses its evaluation mechanisms through a systematic review of their effectiveness in improving instructional programs, student support services, and library and other learning support services.

- What mechanisms does the institution use to gather evidence about the effectiveness of programs and services?
- How effectively do evaluation processes and results contribute to improvement in programs and services?
B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness

- Evidence that the institution has developed processes by which continuous dialogue about both student learning and institutional processes can take place
- Evidence of broad-based participation in the dialogue
- Evidence that clearly stated, measurable goals and objectives guide the college community in making decisions regarding planning and allocation of resources as well as curriculum and program development
- Written, current institutional plans that describe how the institution will achieve its goals
- Evidence that the processes used in planning and institutional improvement are communicated and they provide the means by which the college community can participate in decision-making
- Evidence that goals are developed with the knowledge and understanding of the college community
- Evidence there exists a current cycle in which evaluation results are utilized in integrating planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation
- Evidence that data is both quantitative and qualitative
- Evidence that well-defined, decision-making processes and authority facilitate planning and institutional effectiveness
- Evidence of regular and systematic assessment of the effectiveness of all institutional services and processes
- Evidence that the results of evaluations are disseminated to and understood by the college community
- Evidence that results of regular and systematic assessments are used for institutional improvement
- Evidence of current, systematic program reviews and use of results
- Evidence that program review processes are systematically evaluated