

Why is Accreditation Important?

1. Promotes public confidence in academic programs, specifically by employers who seek qualified graduates,
2. Ensures that educational standards are established and maintained,
3. Allows institutions to be eligible for federal financial assistance for their students,
4. Facilitates students' ability to transfer between accredited institutions, and
5. Fosters employee and student pride in their institutions

Accreditation “provides a process to encourage continuous quality improvement.”

Accrediting agencies do not tell schools what curricula to use or how to teach but rather provide guidelines (standards) which allow for individual differences and ensure flexibility in courses, departments, and schools. “Thus, individual differences in program contents, curricula, and flexibility in course offerings are encouraged within a framework of performance standards.”

Accreditation was previously focused on “student access and equity, enrollment, faculty qualification, student retention, and other similar indicators of institutional effectiveness.” In recent years, accrediting agencies have added emphasis to assessment of student learning while retaining the previous indicators. (Ellis, Keon, & Moskal, 2008)

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 defined in *The Principles* (p. 25) states: “The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:

- 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- 3.3.1.2 administrative support service
- 3.3.1.3 educational support services
- 3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate (College Delegate Assembly, 2008)

At Gadsden State, CS 3.3.1 is fulfilled through the development, implementation and evaluation of our Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Unit Strategic Plans (USPs).

Bibliography

College Delegate Assembly. (2008). *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. Decatur, GA: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools: Commission on Colleges.

Moskal, P. E. (2008). Summary of assessment in higher education and the management of student-learning data. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 7 (2), 269-278.