



Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges

Institutional Effectiveness Evaluator Training Modules

Dear Workshop Participants:

On behalf of the Trustees and staff of the Commission on Colleges, welcome to the Commission on Colleges' Evaluator Training Program designed for individuals who will be participating on the Commission's evaluation committees and who will be evaluating institutions' cases for compliance with the Commission's accreditation institutional effectiveness requirements contained in the *Principles of Accreditation* (2010). The training program is intended to:

1. Enhance the foundation and application of the participants' informed professional judgment.
2. Enhance the levels of consistency across committees in the application of professional judgment.
3. Enrich the value of the review process for member institutions and their constituencies.

To achieve these outcomes, the training program is informed and guided by the following set of principles:

- Principle #1: The committee is comprised of evaluators in the review process.
- Principle #2: The committee conducts its review within the context of the institution's mission and the policies and procedures and the *Principles of Accreditation* of the Commission on Colleges.
- Principle #3: The committee conducts its review in a collegial manner.
- Principle #4: The committee demonstrates integrity in all aspects of its review.
- Principle #5: The committee applies its informed professional judgment in a responsible manner.
- Principle #6: The committee conducts a review that is of value to the institution.
- Principle #7: The committee review ensures accountability to the institution's constituencies and the larger community of higher education.

The training program is divided into two components (Pre-Workshop and Workshop) each playing important roles in the training process. The Pre-Workshop components consist of modules focusing on specific, but related, issues that provide the foundation for the effective and efficient evaluation of institutions. The modules begin with a macro perspective of the role and scope of accreditation in higher education and move to more focused discussions of institutional effectiveness and the formation of professional judgment.

The On-Site Workshop is based on brief case studies. It is designed to apply the concepts and principles set forth in the Pre-Workshop modules to case studies focusing on issues related to institutional effectiveness. The workshop provides guided opportunities to practice evaluating an institution and its case for compliance. The discussions will be guided by facilitators who are among the Commission's cadre of experienced evaluators addressing institutional effectiveness issues.

MODULE 1: OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION

Module Focus:

Explains the philosophy and concept of self-regulation in higher education

Defines accreditation, its purposes and characteristics

Describes the review process and the reviewer's role

Explains how the accreditation process assists higher education institutions

Discusses the scope and mission of the SACSCOC

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. The learner will be able to describe self-regulation in higher education.
2. The learner will be able to explain higher education accreditation as both a process and product.
3. The learner will be able to explain the role of evaluation committees in the accreditation process.
4. The learner will be able to describe the geographic region and types of institutions comprising the membership of SACSCOC.

Philosophy of Accreditation

Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions.

Both a process and a product, accreditation relies on integrity, thoughtful and principled judgment, rigorous application of requirements, and a context of trust. The process provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services. Based upon reasoned judgment, the process stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public.

The product of accreditation is a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements [of the membership of the accreditation association].

Principles of Accreditation, 2008, p. 2

Accreditation Associations

U. S. accreditation organizations, formed over a century ago, have evolved in response to the needs of educational institutions and society. In James Miller's centenary history of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, he noted that SACS acted in "shaping society (and was) shaped by society" (Miller 1998, p. 35). Accreditation associations are organized at regional, national and professional levels, and they collectively represent the higher education community. Although the members of each accreditation association establish requirements unique to their institutions, all have the following characteristics:

1. The members determine the specific membership requirements.

2. Each institution conducts a comprehensive analysis of its compliance with the association's requirements.
3. An evaluation committee conducts an evaluation of the institution's case.
4. Elected representatives of the association review and determine the institution's accreditation status.

Accreditation in the United States is a voluntary and self-regulatory mechanism of the higher education community. It plays a significant role in fostering public confidence in the educational enterprise, maintaining standards, enhancing institutional effectiveness and improving higher education by establishing a common set of requirements with which accredited institutions must comply.

Accreditation associations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education also complete a review process to ensure that they are operating within the Department's regulations. In addition, the accrediting community established an umbrella organization - the Council on Higher Education Accreditation - that brings the associations together to address common interests.

The success of the reaffirmation process depends on four paramount concepts:

1. The process is conducted by **evaluators** whose professional expertise, experience and informed understanding of the issues enable them to apply their professional judgment in a reasonable and responsible manner.
2. All parties to the review process (committees, institutions and the accrediting agency) operate with **integrity and confidentiality** and maintain a relationship of **trust and forthrightness**.
3. All parties are committed to **quality enhancement and continuous improvement**.
4. The institution supports and enhances **student learning** within the context of its mission.

Although accreditation associations utilize different review processes, they all share the belief that evaluators can apply qualified collective professional judgment to evidence presented by an institution and assess compliance with the accreditation community's requirements.

The Role of SACSCOC

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. The Commission's mission is the enhancement of educational quality throughout the region and the improvement of the effectiveness of institutions by ensuring that they meet standards established by the higher education community. SACSCOC serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Latin America, and other international sites approved by the Commission on Colleges that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees. The Commission also accepts applications from other international institutions of higher education.

The Commission expects institutions to enhance the quality of programs and services and create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occur in a manner appropriate to

each institution's mission. At the heart of SACSCOC's philosophy of accreditation is the concept of quality enhancement and the presumption that each member institution is engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Each institution is expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all of its programs and services.

SACSCOC supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; the right of students to access opportunities for learning; and for the open exchange of ideas; however, exercise of the aforementioned rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

MODULE 2: THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

Module Focus:

Describes the Commission's review process

Describes the tenets that guide the review process

Provides an overview of SACSCOC's review process

Describes the timelines, tasks and responsibilities of the Off-Site and On-site Reaffirmation Committees

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. The learner will be able to describe the components of the Commission's three-tiered, review process.
2. The learner will be able to describe the role of evaluation committees in determining the accreditation status of a candidate and/or a member institution.
3. The learner will be able to identify the tenets of the SACSCOC review process.
4. The learner will be able to explain the responsibilities of evaluation committee members.
5. The learner will be able to describe the differences in the size, focus and function of an Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and an On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

SACSCOC Review and Reaffirmation Process

SACSCOC's process for determining an institution's accreditation status involves three steps:

1. The institution analyzes its compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements contained in *The Principles of Accreditation*. The internal review prompts the institution to consider its effectiveness in achieving its stated mission; compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements; efforts to enhance the quality of student learning, programs and services offered to its constituencies; and success in accomplishing its mission. This review process is the core of continuous quality improvement.
2. Once an institution has conducted its own analysis, an external evaluation committee conducts a review of the institution's materials, and in the case of a site visit, gathers additional information by meeting with various constituents of the institution. At the conclusion of its review, the evaluation committee prepares a report which is forwarded to the institution and the Commission on Colleges.
3. The seventy-seven member Board of Trustees of the Commission on Colleges reviews the reports from the institution and the evaluation committee and determines the institution's accreditation status.

Evaluation Committees

The Commission's evaluation committees have different foci, size and composition. A description of the types of committees and materials pertaining to them are available on the Commission's web site, (http://www.sacscoc.org/committee_forms1.asp). Each of the following committees has its own evaluation documents and review procedures:

1. **Candidacy Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking candidacy. The review focuses only on Core Requirements 1-11, selected Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements.
2. **Accreditation Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking initial membership. The review focuses on all Core Requirements, with the exception of CR 2.12 (Quality Enhancement), Comprehensive Standards (excluding CS 3.3.2) and Federal Requirements. Accreditation reviews are conducted in a manner similar to reaffirmation reviews.
3. **Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking continued membership. The comprehensive review addresses all Core Requirements except CR 2.12 (Quality Enhancement) and Comprehensive Standards (excluding CS 3.3.2, Quality Enhancement) and Federal Requirements. The off-site reaffirmation committee process is described in a following section.
4. **On-Site Reaffirmation Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking continued membership. The review addresses an institution's compliance with the standards cited by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and the acceptability of its Quality Enhancement Plan (CR 2.12 and CS 3.3.2). The committee also reviews a number of accreditation standards identified by the US. Department of Education. The on-site reaffirmation committee process is described in a following section.
5. **Special Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking continued accreditation following evaluation of accreditation-related institutional circumstances. The review focuses primary attention on selected requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation*.
6. **Substantive Change Committees** conduct reviews of institutions seeking approval and continued accreditation following a change, a significant modification or expansion of the institution's mission, governance, programs, locations and/or modes of delivery. The review focuses primary on selected Core Requirements and/or Comprehensive Standards.

Evaluation Committee Tenets

The review process requires comparable and consistent application of the Commission's requirements, policies and procedures across the broad spectrum of institutions comprising the SACSCOC membership. Objectivity and consistency is important to the institution and to the larger higher-education community. The Commission's review process and the committee's work are characterized by the objective and consistent application of the following tenets:

1. **The evaluation committee conducts a review that is valuable to the institution:** The committee's goal is to be of value to the institution by providing insight and guidance on actions the institution might take to enhance its efforts to achieve the stated mission.

2. **The review process is conducted by qualified evaluators:** The evaluation committee is comprised of knowledgeable individuals whose professional expertise and experiences are appropriate to their roles and responsibilities on the committee.
3. **The committee demonstrates personal and professional integrity in all aspects of its review:** Integrity in the accreditation process is best understood in the context of the institutional review, the utilization of professional judgment by evaluators employing commonly accepted sound academic theories and practice and the conscientious application of *The Principles of Accreditation*. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures and decisions are predicated on the integrity of all parties. Members of an evaluation committee are expected to demonstrate personal and professional commitment to integrity through word and deed in all their interactions with the institution under review. The Commission focuses considerable attention on issues such as conflict of interest to ensure that the committee's collective judgment is not impeded by any actual or perceived conflicts.
4. **The committee conducts its review within the context of the institution's mission, *The Principles of Accreditation* and the Commission's policies and procedures:** The accreditation process requires consideration of several complementary goals. Guided by *The Principles of Accreditation*, the committee must conduct the review process with an appreciation for the particular mission of the institution under review. The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to enhance the quality of their programs and services within the context of available resources and capacities. The Commission also expects the institution's mission to facilitate an environment where teaching, public service, research and learning occur.
5. **The committee conducts its review in a collegial, confidential, and professional manner:** The committee comes to the institution as guests and professional colleagues. Committee members are expected to conduct themselves in a cordial, collegial and professional manner. To ensure that the committee's interactions with the institution are treated with confidentiality and are conducted in a candid forthright manner, the committee shares its findings with the institution but does not discuss the issues with anyone not directly involved in the review. The deliberations of the committee are not shared with others within the institution's community or beyond.
6. **The committee applies its informed and responsible judgment in determining the institution's compliance with the *Principles*:** The committee exercises its collective professional judgment in a consistent, reasoned and reasonable fashion in assessing the extent to which the institution demonstrates its compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation*.

The Reaffirmation Process

Institutions seeking reaffirmation with SACSCOC are organized into two separate tracks, each with separate guidelines. Institutions offering only undergraduate degrees begin the process in January of year one and complete it in June of year three. Institutions offering graduate degrees begin the process in June of year one and complete it in December of year three.

All institutions undertake a comprehensive review of their compliance with applicable accreditation requirements every ten years. The process requires the institution to complete a Compliance Certification document and a Quality Enhancement Plan. The Commission's evaluation of the aforementioned and other supporting documents is conducted in the three-tiered, review process.

A. Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

An Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, normally composed of eight to ten evaluators, is the first level of external review after the institution completes its own assessment of its compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements. The committee reviews Compliance Certifications of a group of three comparable institutions and makes preliminary judgments regarding each institution's compliance with the Core Requirements (except CR 2.12) and Comprehensive Standards (except CS 3.3.2) in *The Principles of Accreditation*.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee is advisory to both the institution and the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee that will conduct a review of the institution based on the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee's report. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee:

1. Reviews documentation provided by three institutions;
2. Provides a written report of its findings for each institution based solely on the written documentation provided by the institution;
3. Conducts its work electronically and during a meeting in Atlanta without visiting the institution;
4. Completes its report without interaction with institutional representatives regarding the substance of their review; and
5. Submits a report that does not include formal Recommendations or decisions regarding the institution's accreditation status.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee report represents a preliminary judgment concerning the extent to which the institution's documentation supports its compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation* requirements. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee's report is forwarded to the institution for its use in developing a Focused Report addressing deficiencies cited in the Off-Site Report. The institution submits its Focused Report to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee that visits the campus four to six months after the Off-Site review.

Timelines for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees meet in Atlanta during either May or November to reach consensus and closure regarding each institution's compliance with the Principles; however, committee members begin reviewing each of the institutions ten or more weeks before the meeting. Institutions offering only undergraduate degrees are reviewed during the spring, and Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees meet during May. Institutions offering graduate degrees are reviewed during the fall, and Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees meet in November.

Invitations to participate on Off-Site Reaffirmation Committees are distributed by the Commission office approximately eight months prior to the committee's single meeting in Atlanta. Committee members receive assignments approximately five months before the meeting, and institutions send reports to committee members approximately three months before the meeting. Committee members review the reports for each of the institutions in the cluster and prepare draft analyses reports prior to the Atlanta meeting. In general, committees will conduct the preliminary analyses during a ten-week period leading up to the meeting.

Tasks of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

Committees receive information from three sources: the institution, the Commission and the committee chair. Each institution in the cluster provides its Compliance Certification with support documentation. Although information may be presented in various ways, institutions typically rely on a combination of CD's and web links.

The SACSCOC office provides the Committee a set of documents, committee assignments and logistics information, and Commission staff provide additional skills training during telephone conference calls. One training topic is SharePoint, the software program that the Committee uses to build its report for each institution under review.

The committee chair will conduct two or more one-hour telephone conference calls with the entire committee. The first call will include a general orientation to the review process, the schedule for reviewing institutions and individual committee assignments. During the second call, (conducted at or near the conclusion of the first institution's review), committee members will discuss preliminary analyses of the institution and identify other issues bearing upon the review. All committee members are expected to participate fully in the discussion, to reflect seriously upon the deliberations and to keep all questions and comments confidential.

Institutional Effectiveness Assignments for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

The institutional effectiveness evaluator on an Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee will be assigned to review specific IE requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation*. Typically, the assignments will include Core Requirement 2.4 and 2.5; Comprehensive Standards 3.1.1, 3.3 (all sub-sections), 3.4.7, and 3.5.1; and Federal Requirements 4.1. The institutional effectiveness evaluator also may be asked to review other standards and/or assist other committee members in reviewing standards that pertain to planning, evaluation or facilities. Committee members with appropriate expertise will be assigned other standards to review, and in some instances, more than one person on the committee will be assigned to review a particular standard. Each evaluator will review the same set of requirements for all of the institutions in the "cluster."

Committee Review for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

The bulk of the committee's work is completed prior to the Atlanta meeting. During that two-day session, the committee will review and finalize its analyses of each of the institutions included in its cluster. The committee will read and discuss its draft report for each institution in the cluster and will determine what further actions, if any, each institution should take to establish compliance. Since the report is preliminary in nature, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee does not make any formal recommendations or statements of non-compliance. Once the committee has completed its review during the May or November meeting in Atlanta, its work is complete, and no additional reviews are required.

B. On-Site Reaffirmation Committee

Approximately four to six months following the Off-Site review, the second level of the review process, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, conducts a focused evaluation of a single institution. The committee has three main tasks:

1. Address issues of compliance identified by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee as well as other requirements within the *Principles*

2. Review any off-site locations or other distance learning initiatives
3. Review the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan to judge its acceptability

Typically, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee has seven to ten (or more) members depending on the complexity of the institution, its instructional locations and the scope of the issues identified in the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee report. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee generally completes its site review in three days. At the conclusion of its visit, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee prepares a report of its findings, noting any requirements where it judged that the institution had not yet established compliance at the time of the review. The Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, along with the institution's response to areas of non-compliance, is forwarded to the Commission for review and action.

Timelines for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee

Typically, invitations to participate on an On-Site Reaffirmation Committee are sent approximately five months prior to the visit; however, there is some variation in the process, depending on the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee findings. Generally, committee members receive information from the institution four weeks prior to the committee visit. The chair will conduct one or more telephone conference calls with committee members prior to the visit to discuss various aspects of the on-site review and share preliminary impressions. Committees must manage time carefully while on campus because a number of issues must be reviewed in a relatively short amount of time, so the chair will develop a detailed itinerary for the committee's three-day visit to the institution.

Tasks of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee

The committee's evaluation of the institution's case for its compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation* begins with an informed understanding of the institution's mission. Members should have a clear understanding of *The Principles of Accreditation* requirements and all SACSCOC policies and procedures that bear upon the committee review. Members should have a thorough knowledge of the specific accreditation requirements for which they will be responsible, and they should study the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee report and the materials submitted by the institution.

The committee will judge the extent to which the institution has established its compliance with the *Principles* and prepare a written report of its findings for SACSCOC. If the committee judges that the institution has not established compliance with a particular requirement, it will write a Recommendation, a formal statement of an action or set of actions that the institution must take to establish compliance. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee is advisory in nature; therefore, it does not accredit the institution or make the final determination of its status with the Commission; however, it may provide guidance and consultation to the institution on issues that will enhance the quality of the institution's programs and services.

Institutional Effectiveness Assignments for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee

Each committee member will have specific assignments appropriate to his or her areas of expertise. The institutional effectiveness evaluator will be responsible for reviewing all of the institutional effectiveness standards and Federal Requirements cited in the Off-Site report. The evaluator also will participate with others in the broader review of the QEP with particular attention to learning outcomes as the linkage among the QEP, institutional effectiveness, the student body profile and the institutional mission. Following the committee review, the chair will compile the committee's draft report and circulate it to members for further editing. This process usually takes between two to six weeks. Once the chair finalizes the report, the committee's work is complete.

C. Review by SACSCOC

The Committees on Compliance and Reports (C&R) are standing committees of the Commission. Five or six C&R Committees convene at any given meeting of the Commission, depending on the number of institutions being reviewed. A C&R Committee reviews reports prepared by evaluation committees and the institutional responses to the reports. The C&R Committee makes a recommendation regarding an institution's reaffirmation of accreditation to the thirteen-member Executive Council for review. The Executive Council recommends action to the full Board of Trustees (comprised of seventy-seven elected members) which makes the final decision on the reaffirmation of an institution. The full Commission convenes twice a year.

MODULE 3: THE COMMITTEE EVALUATOR AND THE FORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

Module Focus:

Describes the desirable characteristics an evaluation committee member

Describes the formation of professional judgment about the extent to which the institution makes a compelling case for its compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation*

Provides examples of issues to consider and questions to explore in developing professional judgment

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. The learner will be able to identify the characteristics of an effective of a SACSCOC evaluation committee.
2. The learner will be able to recognize SACSCOC's term, "professional judgment."
3. The learner will be able to identify the components of the formation of professional judgment.
4. The learner will be able to identify pertinent questions and/or issues that guide the formation of professional judgment about an institution's compliance with a particular accreditation requirement.

Characteristics of a Member of a SACSCOC Evaluation Committee

An effective evaluator brings to the committee an applied understanding of the complexities of a particular area or areas within institutions such as educational programs, student services, institutional effectiveness, libraries and information technology, distance learning, finance and facilities, governance and administration. Additionally, the committee member demonstrates an awareness of current issues, trends and practices within the larger higher education community. The work of an evaluator is guided by the accreditation requirements adopted by the SACSCOC membership and contained in *The Principles of Accreditation* as well as the Commission's policies and procedures applicable to the scope of the particular committee review. All committee members work collaboratively in evaluating the extent to which the institution presents a compelling case for its compliance with the *Principles*.

The quality of the committee member's contributions to the work of the committee is predicated on the following characteristics:

Integrity - The committee member demonstrates the following:

professional and personal honesty and candor

dedication to avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest

ability to conduct an *impartial, informed and reasoned analysis* of the institution's compliance with the *Principles*

commitment to the value of review and institutional enhancement

Expertise - The committee member demonstrates the following:

knowledge of institutional complexities

mature awareness of his or her profession

currency in his or her area(s) of professional expertise
experience in higher education
understanding of the requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation*

Communication skills - The committee member demonstrates the following:
effectiveness in producing clear, coherent, concise and cogent *writing*
ability to *speak* in a clear, coherent and cogent manner
willingness and ability to *listen* to others
commitment to *interact with others* in a professional, collegial, collaborative and coherent manner

Thoroughness - The committee member demonstrates the following:
willingness to perform **due diligence** in examining information provided by the institution
experience in **navigating** electronic data
capacity to synthesize large amounts of information
ability to form **judgments predicated on data** presented by the institution

Efficiency - The committee member demonstrates the following:
proficiency in *assimilating and evaluating* significant amounts of information in a compressed time period
skill in *interpreting* material that may be poorly organized or difficult to locate
ability to *prioritize* work and focus on the most significant issues and data

Objectivity and Consistency - The committee member demonstrates the following:
capacity to evaluate all information without prejudging the institution's compliance
ability to apply requirements and standards evenly within the context of the institution's mission and the Commission's requirements

Confidentiality - The committee member demonstrates the following:
commitment to *handle information* with confidentiality throughout the entire evaluation process
understanding of the constraints of sharing institutional information with others

Collegiality - Collegiality in an accreditation review means that the committee member demonstrates the following:
capacity to *act as a professional colleague* with other committee members and representatives of the institution being evaluated
experience *working in a collaborative manner* with others
ability to *make cogent, informed, timely and focused contributions* to committee discussions

Decisiveness - The committee member demonstrates the capacity to make decisions based on the following:
careful and thorough review of available and accessible evidence
informed analysis of the institution's case
informed and reasonable application of the Principles to the mission of the institution and the expectations of SACSCOC

Professional Judgment

The evaluator's professional judgment is a product of a triangulation of perspectives:

- Professional expertise and experience
- Informed understanding of the requirements of the *Principles*; the nature of the institution's case (assertion, evidence and analysis); the capacity to establish a *goodness of fit* between the institution's mission and case
- Knowledge of the generalized expectations of the membership of the SACSCOC membership

Within the context of peer review, professional judgment about an institution's compliance with *The Principles of Accreditation* is based on the following:

- understanding the requirements of the *Principles*
- capacity to apply the *Principles* within the context of the institution's mission and the scope of the evaluation committee's charge.
- due diligence in examining the institution's case for compliance
- awareness of the expectations of *SACSCOC and its member* institutions

Based on these factors, professional judgment arises from:

Professional background of the committee member. Individuals are selected as members of the evaluation committee because their experiences and expertise in higher education complement the tasks of the evaluation committee. In addition, the new relationship suggests an effective fit with some aspect of the institution being evaluated. The committee member's professional judgments are based on:

- The application of insights gained from their professional background and experiences to the analysis of the institution's case for compliance; and
- The capacity to weigh their perceptions of requirements of the *Principles* and the institution's case against the unique mission of the institution rather than an idealized vision or a comparison with the committee member's home institution.

The institution's case for compliance. The institution is responsible for presenting a comprehensive and compelling case of its compliance. In evaluating the institution's case, the committee member:

- exercises due diligence in identifying the institution's assertion of the extent to which it meets the requirements of the *Principles*;
- exercises due diligence in searching out and evaluating the evidence presented by the institution;
- examines closely the institution's analysis of its case, as well as the linkages between the analysis and the evidence presented;
- weighs the extent to which the institution's case appears reasonable, reasoned and compelling; and
- evaluates the extent to which the institution's case demonstrates its compliance with the requirements of the *Principles*.

The judgment of the individual committee member regarding the extent to which an institution demonstrates its compliance with SACSCOC accreditation requirements is a thoughtful balance and weighing of the perspectives. In all instances, the individual is searching for the preponderance of "evidence" that leads to the judgment; however, the development of the individual's professional judgment represents only part of the evaluation process. The evaluation committee is responsible for receiving and reviewing the individual's analysis and findings as it collectively evaluates the institution's case. Part Three of this module focuses on that process.

Formation of the Committee's Collective Professional Judgment

The committee member formulates and articulates a reasoned and reasonable basis for his or her professional judgment about the institution's compliance with SACSCOC requirements, policies and procedures. However, that does not represent the committee's judgment until all members thoroughly and rigorously vet the issues. The committee's review and deliberations are guided by discussion questions such as:

- What is the institution's assertion regarding its compliance with the *Principles*?
- What is the basis for the institution's assertions made within its case?
- To what extent does the institution's evidence support its case?
- To what extent does the institution's case demonstrate its compliance with the *Principles* within the context of its institutional mission?
- What is the basis for the committee's judgment?
- To what extent does the committee's judgment appear to be consistent with or differ from the general expectations of SACSCOC and its member institutions?

The Institution's Case

The committee is charged with developing an overarching judgment of the institution's case which is analogous to the sum being larger than the individual parts. While each of the components of an institution's case is vital, the committee's task is to weigh the components against one. In this regard, the committee is always addressing whether the institution's case (assertion, evidence and analysis) is sufficient to establish its compliance with the requirement. The committee weighs the information provided by the institution to determine whether the necessary information was presented. Additionally, the committee needs to determine whether the evidence presented by the institution stands the tests of evidence to conclude that it is sufficient to support the case. NOTE: Module Four focuses on the components of an institution's case as well as the evidence that supports the case.

The Institution's assertion of its Compliance. *The Principles of Accreditation* provides an institution with considerable leeway in the interpretation of the extent to which it meets and exceeds the accreditation requirements with respect to its missions. Institutions assume primary responsibility for asserting the extent to which they meet the requirements. When an institution concludes on the basis of its internal review that it is not in compliance with a requirement it is responsible for indicating the basis for that assertion and presenting a means whereby it will establish compliance. In some instances, an institution may present a time line for establishing compliance as well as actions it will take and indicators it will use to evaluate its progress for establishing compliance.

The Institution's Evidence. The institution's case cannot stand without evidence to support the assertions. Module Four looks more closely at the role of evidence and outlines key tests to determine whether the evidence presented is sufficient to demonstrate compliance. Insofar as the development of the committee's professional judgment is concerned, the absence or lack of institutional evidence will adversely affect the committee's judgment about the institution's case for compliance.

The basis of the Institution's Claims. While a case for compliance cannot stand without evidence, evidence by itself does not establish compliance. The institution is responsible for demonstrating the link between the evidence supporting its case, and the claim it is making regarding its compliance with the requirement. The institution is in essence saying, "*The evidence demonstrates compliance because. . .*" The committee weighs the strengths of the institution's analysis in arriving at its judgments about the institution's case.

The Committee's Professional Judgment

The starting point for the committee's discussion is a common understanding of the specific requirement within the *Principles* as well as a shared understanding of expectations regarding the requirement. The committee also applies the *Principles* within the context of the institution's mission as it examines the institution's case for compliance. In the formation of its judgment, the committee also recognizes there may be many different ways that institutions might demonstrate compliance with the requirement. The application of the *Principles* to the institution's case is not a *one size fits all* process.

All members are responsible for participating in the focused discussions about the institution's case. Based on its exploration of questions and issues such as the ones outlined above, the committee's task is to weigh all available information, perspectives and understandings to develop its collective judgment of the institution's compliance.

MODULE 4: FOUNDATIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Module Focus:

Describes four key dimensions of evaluating an institution's case for its compliance with the requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation* bearing on institutional effectiveness.

Expected Learning Outcomes

1. The learner will be able to identify the Case Analysis Factors an institutional effectiveness evaluator considers when judging an institution's case for compliance.
2. The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements within *The Principles of Accreditation* pertaining to institutional effectiveness.
3. The learner will be able to identify the components of an effective system of institutional planning and assessment.
4. The learner will be able to identify evidence of systematic institutional and unit-level planning.
5. The learner will be able to distinguish among the following types of outcomes:
 - institutional outcomes;
 - unit outcomes;
 - program outcomes; and
 - learning outcomes.
6. The learner will be able to distinguish among various assessment measurements of outcomes.

Case Analysis Factors (CAF)

Case Analysis Factors include the data or other evidence that the evaluator needs to consider when analyzing an institution's case for its compliance. Evaluating an institution's case for its compliance with SACSCOC requirements begins with an understanding of the critical factors that should be considered prior to an exploration of the institution's case. Elements establishing the context for an effective and useful evaluation of the institution's case for compliance are referred to as the Case Analysis Factors.

CAF1 - Knowing and understanding the language of *The Principles of Accreditation*

Conducting an evaluation of an institution's case for its compliance with a specific Core Requirement, Comprehensive Standard or Federal Requirement begins with a careful reading of the requirement itself. Occasionally, an individual requirement is comprised of a multiple number of parts. Such is the case with Core Requirement 2.5 which states:

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and

outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

CR 2.5 bundles a number of issues compactly into a single statement. From the perspective of the evaluator it is essential to focus on the operative key words *engages* and *processes* in the requirement. In responding to this requirement, the burden is on the institution to provide a compelling case that has incorporated and continues to use its planning and evaluation processes within its daily operations and its decision-making procedures. It is not acceptable for an institution to indicate that “it’s planning to plan” or is about to initiate a planning and evaluation process.

This Core Requirement focuses on the processes an institution uses for its planning and evaluation purposes. The institution needs to demonstrate that it has processes in place to guide its planning and evaluation activities. The *Principles* establishes the essential characteristics of this concept – “ongoing,” “integrated,” “institutional-wide,” “research based.” In order to establish its compliance with this concept, the institution needs to make a case that it satisfies *all* of the characteristics. Notice that the requirement does not stipulate how an institution must engage in its processes, but it does mandate the characteristics of the processes. The evaluator will rely on questions such as the following to guide the analysis of the institution’s case:

- By what professional measures will I know X (e.g., “ongoing,” “integrated,” etc.) when I see it?
- What will the institution need to provide in order to demonstrate compliance with X?
- How much do I need to see in order to make a judgment about the institution’s compliance with X?

Once the *Principles* establish the *characteristics* of the institution’s processes, CR 2.5 then extends the analysis to a consideration of the *consequences* of the processes. While CR 2.5 assiduously avoids a focus on outcomes, it does mandate that the institution’s processes incorporate a “systematic review,” “result in continuing improvement” and provide evidence that the institution is effective in accomplishing its mission.

At other times requirements within the *Principles* are stated with a precise level of ambiguity. The language of the document is intentionally crafted in a way that provides institutions with considerable flexibility in adapting the *Principles* to their institutional cultures and missions. For example, Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 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 [its] educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.

The requirement begs questions such as:

- What is an *expected outcome*?
- How should an institution assess its outcome?
- What is a *learning outcome*?
- What constitutes *evidence of improvement*?

While SACSCOC defines an *outcome* as a measurable statement of something that the institution intends to accomplish, the language of the *Principles* affords institutions with flexibility in demonstrating their compliance with the requirement. For instance, the institution is required to demonstrate that it assesses its outcomes without stipulating *how* it is to assess them. What is important is that the institution needs to present a compelling case that its means of assessing a particular outcome are reasonable and appropriate.

As evidenced in the two examples cited above, the language of the *Principles* requires the application of the evaluator's informed, reasoned, and reasonable analysis when arriving at a professional judgment about the institution's compliance. The application of the *Principles* to the institution's case does not rest on the proposition that "one size fits all." The issue is quite the opposite -- the *Principles* requires the acknowledgement that there may be multiple ways in which institutions might make their cases. Knowledge of the language of the *Principles* and an understanding of the requirement itself are essential first steps in approaching the task of evaluating the extent to which the institution demonstrates its compliance.

CAF2 - Knowledge of the Institution's Mission

The institution's mission is the foundation for applying the *Principles*. SACSCOC affirms the institution's right to establish its institutional mission; however, SACSCOC also requires that the institution make a case that its mission is compatible with other member institutions within SACSCOC and in the higher education community. Additionally, the institution is responsible for making a case demonstrating its capacity and progress in achieving its mission. Thus, a clear statement of the institution's mission is fundamental to judging the effectiveness of the institution's planning and evaluation processes. It identifies the primary purpose(s) of the institution. The mission statement also serves as the framework for the broad institutional goals as well as the more focused goals established at various levels within the institution.

CAF3 - Understanding the Scope of the Evaluation Committee Review

In addition to a consideration of CAF 1 and 2, the evaluator also needs to have a clear understanding of the purpose of the evaluation committee and the scope of its review because the factors will guide the focus of the review. For instance, if a Substantive Change Committee is conducting a review of a newly approved graduate program at an institution with a range of undergraduate programs, then the primary focus of the committee review will normally be on the application of the *Principles* as it pertains to the graduate program rather than a more broad review that includes undergraduate programs as well. Not all institutional effectiveness requirements within the *Principles* necessarily apply to all evaluation committees (see Table A). An Off-Site Committee will base its review on an examination of documentation provided by the institution for all applicable requirements within the *Principles*, except CR 2.12 and CS 3.3.2 (Quality Enhancement Plan) which is only evaluated by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. Additionally, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee has no interaction with the institution. An On-Site Committee builds on the work of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and may conduct a more focused review of the *Principles* based on the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. However, it will always include a review of CR 2.12 within its review. (See Table A)

Institutional Effectiveness Requirements in *The Principles of Accreditation*

The following section highlights the accreditation requirements within the *Principles* that bear upon institutional effectiveness. The requirements listed below are generally items that the institutional effectiveness evaluator will review; however, other members of the committee are often involved in reviewing them. The construct of *institutional effectiveness* permeates the *Principles*. Consequently the institutional effectiveness evaluator may be asked to review other requirements depending on the scope of the committee review, the complexity of the institution, and the other areas of expertise represented on the committee.

The requirements are also cross referenced with five types of evaluation committees that generally require the application of the professional expertise and experience of the Institutional Effectiveness evaluator. The sixth type of evaluation committee (Special Committee) may or may not involve issues related to institutional effectiveness; however, they are always focused on specific issues at the institution.

Table A

Institutional Effectiveness Evaluator Responsibilities by Type of Committee

IE Evaluator Responsibilities	Candidacy Committee	Accreditation Committee	Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee	On-Site Reaffirmation Committee	Substantive Change Committee
Primary Responsibilities	CR 2.4 CR 2.5 CS 3.1 CS 3.3 CS 3.5.1	CR 2.4 CR 2.5 CS 3.1 CS 3.3 CS 3.5.1	CR 2.4 CR 2.5 CS 3.1.1 CS 3.3 CS 3.4.7 FR 4.1	CR 2.4 CR 2.5 CR 2.8 CR 2.12.1 CS 3.3.1 Others as warranted based on the Off-Site Report	CR 2.5 CS 3.1 CS 3.3
Secondary Responsibilities	CS 3.5.1 FR 4.1	CS 3.2.10 CS 3.7.2 FR 4.1	CS 3.5.1 CS 3.7.2	FR 4.1	

Types of Evidence Pertaining to Institutional Effectiveness

The evaluator should expect to review certain types of evidence when assessing compliance with the institutional effectiveness requirements. This section identifies examples of the types of documentation normally reviewed to determine whether the institution establishes its case for compliance with specific accreditation requirements. The section is organized by some of the requirements within the *Principles* and provides examples of evidence the evaluator might expect to encounter. The examples within each requirement parallel what can be found in the *Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation* which is focused on what institutions should be providing in their reports to evaluation committees. Institutions are unique so the types of evidence they present may vary.

CR 2.4 *The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.*

- A copy of the current mission statement
- Print and electronic examples of publications in which the mission statement is published
- Evidence that the mission statement encompasses all of the institution’s programs, services and activities

CR 2.5 *The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.*

- Evidence that the institution's planning and evaluation processes incorporate a review of its mission;
- Institutional plans and budgets that demonstrate the linkage of assessment findings to planning at all levels;
- Minutes of committees engaged in planning and evaluation of goals and outcomes;
- Documentation that relates to institutional effectiveness, such as budget preparation instructions, minutes of budget presentation meetings, annual reports, annual assessment updates, institutional effectiveness reports; and
- Evidence of actions taken to improve the quality of the institution's programs and services based on a consideration of the results of its evaluation of its planning and evaluation processes.

CS 3.1.1 *The mission statement is current and comprehensive, accurately guides the institution's operations, is periodically reviewed and updated, is approved by the governing board, and is communicated to the institution's constituencies.*

- Evidence that the institution's mission statement encompasses its current programs, services and activities;
- Mission statement and examples of how it is disseminated;
- Governing board minutes documenting approval and periodic review of the mission statement and resulting changes made to the statement, when appropriate; and
- Evidence that the institution's mission statement guides its programs, services and activities.

CS 3.3.1 *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 services

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

- Evidence that the institution has identified the expected outcomes for its educational programs and for administrative and educational support services, as well as its research and community/public service activities conducted within the scope of its mission;
- Evidence that the institution evaluates the extent to which it achieves its expected outcomes; and
- Documentation that the institution uses the results of its assessments to improve the institution.

CS 3.4.7 *The institution ensures the quality of educational programs and courses offered through consortial relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution.*

- Evidence that the institution evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution.

FR 4.1 *The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.*

- Evidence such as course completion by discipline, pass rates on state licensing exams, job placement rates by degree program, and others that demonstrate the success of its students.

Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness Processes and Outcomes

The challenges of evaluating an institution's institutional effectiveness processes and outcomes are threefold. First, the scope of institutional effectiveness within the *Principles* itself is broad, lying at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation:

[The] concept of quality enhancement presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and be able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. . . . [An] institution is expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all its programs and services. (Principles, 2010, p. 2)

Because the concept touches on so many aspects of the institution --mission, governance, administration, educational programs, faculty, administrative and educational support programs and services – the tasks of the institutional effectiveness evaluator also touch upon most aspects of the institution.

Second, SACSCOC does not prescribe a particular approach to institutional effectiveness. Thus, as an IE evaluator it is important to remember that institutions have considerable latitude in determining what systems and processes of planning and evaluation work best for them. Suspend the impulse to compare and judge the institution's planning and evaluation processes with a particular model or approach. Instead, focus on the characteristics and components of the institution's system and consider closely the merits of its approach. *Does it satisfy the requirements of the Principles and is it of value to the institution in its ongoing commitment to achieving the institutional mission?*

The third challenge of evaluating the institution's processes and outcomes is that the processes function as systems within a system. Such a perspective requires that the evaluator have an understanding of the interlocking nature of the systems for planning and evaluation at all levels within the institution. It also requires that the evaluator have a keen sensitivity to the cultural dynamics of the institution and its components, as well as an awareness of the nuances of languages within and among the units.

Each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements within the *Principles* has its own unique set of issues and questions. Therefore, the institutional effectiveness evaluator needs to formulate a series of questions for each requirement that may guide the analysis of the strength of the institution's case. The questions listed below serve as baseline indicators that may in turn generate additional questions and lines of inquiry based on the information provided (or not provided) by the institution.

- To what extent do the outcome statements for the units of analysis seem reasonable and appropriate for the given unit?
- Do the outcome statements appear comprehensive in terms of addressing the full range of programs, services, and activities provided by the unit?

- To what extent has the institution demonstrated that the outcomes are measurable – and is it possible to discern whether the outcomes have been achieved?
- To what extent do the measurements of the outcomes relate to the outcomes themselves?
- Does the institution’s case provide evidence that the institution has used the results of its assessments to inform the decision making process for enhancing the capacity of the unit to achieve its stated purpose and that of the institution?
- What additional information, if any, does the institution need to provide in establishing its compliance with the specific requirement?

Because institutional effectiveness is integrated within all levels of the institution, the following section provides several tips the evaluator is likely to encounter. It also provides a more in-depth example of a particular Comprehensive Standard (i.e., CS 3.3.1) that is the object of considerable discussion among committees.

TIPS – types of questions to pose and evidence to expect pertaining to the institution’s case for its compliance with institutional effectiveness requirements:

Tips for evaluating the Institutional and Unit-Level Planning Processes

Look for evidence of:

1. an administrative structure for its institutional effectiveness system, including items such as organizational charts, descriptions of administrative responsibilities;
2. policies and procedures for directing its planning processes and for integrating them into the institution’s decision-making systems’
3. the commitment of the institution’s leadership to the planning processes;
4. the involvement of faculty, staff, and governing boards in the planning process;
5. the use of planning processes to improve or enhance the institution and its organizational units; and
6. integration of planning into ongoing operations of the institution such as:
 - budgeting and resource allocation;
 - annual institutional and unit level planning calendars;
 - structured program reviews with comparable components;
 - annual reporting; and
 - planning retreats, workshops, and/or activities for faculty, administration, and governing boards.

Tips for Evaluating the Institution’s Assessment Systems

Approaches to assessment are as varied as the approaches to planning; however, the following tips can identify indicators of the ways in which institutions assess their planning activities

Look for evidence of:

1. ongoing assessment activities;
 - a. To what extent and in what ways are the means of assessment related to the plans and/or outcomes?
 - b. How frequently are data gathered?
 - c. What information is created from the data?
 - d. Who is responsible for ensuring that the assessment activities occur?
 - e. How does the institution ensure accountability for conducting the assessment activities?

- f. How is that information used to make decisions designed to improve that which is being assessed?
2. levels of assessment within the institution;
 3. a robust and meaningful linkage between institutional and unit levels of assessments; and
 4. the use of assessments to improve or enhance the institution and its organizational units.

CS 3.3.1 serves as an example of the more detailed sets of questions that might be developed for each of the institutional effectiveness requirements within Table A.

Tips for Evaluating the Institution’s Compliance with 3.3.1 as it pertains to its Educational Programs

Look for evidence that:

1. the institution has established measurable expected outcomes as well as learning outcomes for its educational programs;
2. defines or describes learning outcomes for the educational programs (i.e., is it a learning outcome defined as a skill? a behavior? acquisition of information? value-added?);
3. the institution assesses the students’ achievement of the learning outcomes:
 - To what extent does the evidence presented rely on indirect measures such as surveys and self-reports?
 - Is direct assessment of student learning a prominent feature in departmental assessment processes (e.g., testing, evaluation of student work)?
 - Are the assessments related to the expected and learning outcomes that are being evaluated?
4. the institution evaluates the effectiveness of its educational programs and services; and
5. illustrates the extent to which the institution provided evidence that its departments use the results of their assessments to improve or enhance the department’s capacity to fulfill its purpose and expected outcomes.

Tips for Evaluating the Institution’s Compliance with 3.3.1 as it pertains to its Administrative and Educational Support Services

Look for evidence that:

1. the institution has established measurable outcomes for its administrative and educational support services units;
2. the units provide evidence that they assess the extent to which they achieved their expected outcomes; and
3. the institution uses the results of the assessments of its administrative and educational support units to improve or enhance the unit’s capacity to achieve the expected outcomes.

Tips for evaluating the institution’s compliance with 3.3.1 as it pertains to its Research and Public Service within the mission statement

Look for evidence that:

1. identifies the institution’s expected outcomes for its research function;
2. describes how its research function is organized at the institution;
3. describes the institution’s means for evaluating its expected research outcomes;

4. demonstrates the use of assessment results of its research function to make any necessary improvements;
5. identifies the expected outcomes for its public/community service and outreach functions;
6. describes how the research outcomes are evaluated by the institution; and
7. demonstrates the use of the results of its assessment of its public/community service and outreach functions to make any necessary improvements

Summary

This module has provided an overview of the more salient topics and issues the institutional effectiveness evaluator needs to consider when arriving at a professional judgment about the institution's case for compliance. The module has not advocated a singular approach to the evaluation of an institution's case but has promoted a set of questions to guide your analysis and assist you in shaping your professional judgment. In every situation, the institutional effectiveness evaluator must ensure that professional judgment about an institution's case for compliance within the institutional effectiveness requirements is grounded in an understanding of *The Principles of Accreditation*, an awareness of the institution's mission, the purpose of the committee review and a thorough understanding of the components of an institution's case for compliance.