

PROPOSED NEW POLICY

Policy on Outcomes (initial review)

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) places high emphasis on achievement of outcomes related to institution or program mission. This policy offers guidance to institutions concerning outcomes, COA review considerations, and communication of outcomes to the public in a meaningful and consumer-friendly fashion.

Outcomes must:

- Support mission fulfillment
- Be measurable
- Be accompanied by metrics or other means to effectively assess fulfillment
- Use multiple means of assessment for validation
- Be easily accessible on the institutional website

Mission Fulfillment

ABHE expects outcomes to demonstrate mission fulfillment. Objectives (intended results) may reflect elements of the mission rather than the mission as a whole, in which case, multiple objectives would need to be developed and reflected in outcomes (demonstrated results). Student learning outcomes must factor significantly into fulfillment of institutional and program objectives and be appropriate for biblical higher education as well as the level of credential offered for each program (undergraduate certificate, associate's degree, baccalaureate degree, graduate certificate, master's degree, or doctoral degree).

Where an institution offers multiple academic programs, program objectives and outcomes must be articulated for each program and program objectives must align with the mission. Program outcomes may be used as an indicator of fulfillment of program objectives, institutional objectives, and/or institutional mission. Evaluators will consider the appropriateness of objectives/outcomes in relation to mission fulfillment based on face validity.

Measurability

Outcomes need to be measurable. ABHE Standard 2 allows for quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as other unique approaches the institution may develop that effectively assess outcomes. For example, the percentage of students achieving a benchmark test score on a standardized examination (quantitative), analysis of student work for outcomes-related characteristics (qualitative), and testimonials from employers/ministry supervisors as evidence of outcome achievement would all be acceptable means of measurement.

The key to effective measurement, however, is to ensure that the results accurately reflect the population described. Statements of outcomes should reflect observations concerning all students in the program (aggregate results), not just outstanding achievement by some of the students in the program. If sampling techniques are employed, the institution needs to be careful that sampling results yield conclusions that accurately reflect the total population.

Effective Assessment of Fulfillment

Outcomes should reflect the extent to which students and the institution are achieving stated objectives, and as such, there need to be defined indicators of success (e.g., benchmarks). Institutions are expected to identify reasonable indicators of success that serve as assessment goals and confirmation to the public that the institution is fulfilling its objectives. Where an institution falls short in meeting these indicators of success, the institution is expected to have and implement an Institutional Improvement Plan that articulates both action step and resources needed for improvement to achieve objectives. A reasonable majority of students must be achieving the outcome for claims that the institution fulfills the outcome (e.g., 75% of students).

Multiple Means of Validation

Institutions should not rely on a single source or assessment tool as the basis for determining fulfillment of objectives. The assessment arsenal should include a variety of inputs. Typical resources include achievement test results, professional licensure examinations or ordination results, employer opinion surveys, field observation reports, validations by faculty, and alumni and student surveys. Preference should be given to indicators that directly assess demonstration of knowledge or skills identified in the objective, rather than indirect indicators (such as student opinion surveys). Course grades should not be used for outcomes assessment, however, satisfactory completion of specific assignments in courses may be an indicator of outcome achievement.

Easy Public Access to Outcomes Data

ABHE Standard 1 requires that the mission statement, institutional goals, and student learning objectives be easily accessible on the website and in the institution's academic catalog(s). Institutional performance and student achievement outcomes must be available on the website through an easily identified link on the institution's homepage. Anyone should be able to easily identify the link on the homepage that will yield outcomes data. A reasonable link name is one that prospective students, parents, donors, accreditors and regulators, and the general public would readily identify as the appropriate place to click to find outcomes data. Obscure link names should be avoided. Some of the common names used by institutions for such homepage links include the following:

- About
- Student Achievement
- Outcomes Data
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Institutional Research
- Consumer Information

The homepage link should also lead directly to outcomes data or a landing page which itemizes outcomes data available. Generally, two clicks from the homepage to find outcomes data is reasonable. If clicking through several additional pages is needed to locate outcomes data, accessibility is deficient.

Meaningful Consumer Information

Outcomes data must be stated in a meaningful fashion that the general public would understand. Percentage data should be accompanied by the number of students in the cohort or population that the percentage reflects. Where the number of responses is cited, the total in the population should also be cited (e.g., "57 out of 100 May 2015 graduates were employed in positions related to their major 3 years after graduation"). Reporting should also reference what year(s) the data reflects (e.g., "87% of the 247 students who graduated in 2017 through 2020 would 'recommend' or 'strongly recommend' the college to their friends").

Since ABHE institutions equip graduates for a life of Christian service, not just careers in ministry or other professions, institutions are at liberty to consider volunteer service as fulfillment of mission goals and employment/placement statistics. If volunteer service is included in such statistics, this should be clearly identified in the outcome statement.

For many ABHE institutions, a year or two of biblical higher education is the goal for students who would otherwise receive a completely secular higher education. Students who transfer to programs at other institutions of higher education rather than complete a program at the ABHE institution may be included as “transfer-out” students and reported as a combined “graduation/transfer-out rate.” Data reported this way should be clear in related outcome statements.

Institutions and evaluators are encouraged to use the following rubric in evaluating outcome statements and results.

Unsatisfactory Achievement of Expectation	Minimal Achievement of Expectation	Substantial Achievement of Expectation	Exemplary Achievement of Expectation
No institutional objective is clearly defined.	Some institutional objectives are clearly defined.	Most institutional objectives are clearly defined.	All institutional objectives are clearly defined.
No institutional objective supports mission fulfillment.	Some institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.	Most institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.	All institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.
No program student learning objective is clearly defined.	Some program student learning objectives are clearly defined.	Most program student learning objectives are clearly defined.	All program student learning objectives are clearly defined.
No objective is stated in measurable terms.	Some objectives are stated in measurable terms.	Most objectives are stated in measurable terms.	All objectives are stated in measurable terms.
No student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.	Some student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.	Most student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.	All student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.
No indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.	Some indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.	Most indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.	All indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.
No outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.	Some outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.	Most outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.	All outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.

No outcomes evidence objectives are being met.	Some outcomes evidence objectives are being met.	Most outcomes evidence objectives are being met.	All outcomes evidence objectives are being met.
Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years consistently do not meet ABHE expectations.	Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years marginally or inconsistently meet ABHE expectations.	Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a small margin.	Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a large margin.
Retention rates over the last 3 years do not meet ABHE expectations.	Retention rates over the last 3 years marginally or inconsistently meet ABHE expectations.	Retention rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a small margin.	Retention rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a large margin.

Institutions that fail to achieve their stated objectives and COA-designated student achievement indicator benchmarks on an ongoing basis will be subject to COA review and potential sanction.

PROPOSED August 2020