

Background for draft proposed changes to the CEA Standards

The Standards Review Committee (SRC) reviews the CEA Standards on a regular cycle in order to ensure that they are clear, continue to be relevant, and reflect changes in the field. The review is structured and includes committee review of the intent of the standard(s), review of site evaluations and data on standards compliance, input from the Commission, input from the field and experts such as through task forces and surveys, a review of the intent of the standard, and other forms of input. The Curriculum, Length and Structure of the Program of Study, and Student Achievement standards are currently under SRC review. The SRC identified four topics related to these standards requiring attention. The following briefs provide background for each of the four topics, describing the general issues needing to be addressed and an overview of the draft proposed changes.

Topic 1

Clarity of the use of “proficiency”, “achievement”, and “assessment” and clarity of the intent of the standards where these concepts and terms are used

The issue

Use of the terms “proficiency,” “achievement,” and “assessment” provide clarity to CEA constituents and programs/institutions undergoing accreditation as to what is meant by these terms, and how these terms are used to represent compliance with CEA standards. Establishing the common use of the terms today clarifies their use in the field and consistent use of these terms within the discussion promotes greater compliance with the Student Achievement standards as a result.

Proposed changes

The use of these terms within the CEA standards and discussion was discussed by the Task Force. The Task Force proposes that Appendix A no longer be used, that some useful content within it should be included as clarification within the relevant standards discussions, and any remaining information should be incorporated into CEA training as appropriate. Proposed definitions of each term have been refined and clarified in the Glossary to reflect current practice in the field. In draft proposed changes, consistent use of the terms as revised and proposed in the Glossary has been monitored and adjusted throughout the CEA Standards and Discussion, as well as throughout the relevant standards in Curriculum, Length and Structure of Program of Study, and Student Achievement. A specific proposed change of note is the accurate use of “achievement” in place of “proficiency” where results attributable to the course of instruction are referenced. The Task Force also recommends that a reference to the appropriate role of external proficiency scales be included in the discussion of curriculum design, but it should be clear that CEA does not require that a link to an external scale be inherent in curriculum design, assessment practices, or progression decisions.

Topic 2

Clarity and appropriate positioning within the standards of “significant progress relative to the norms of the field” as a factor in curriculum quality

The issue

The CEA Standards state good practices relative to two concepts, one related to curriculum design and one to student movement within and through that curriculum and through the program. Throughout the standards (and in Appendix A in the Accreditation and Reviewer Handbooks), these two concepts

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are variously called satisfactory academic progress, significant academic progress, normal progress, significant progress or accomplishment, significant progress relative to the norms of the field, and so forth; SEVP and other actors in the field also use these terms variously. In the standards, this multiplicity of terms confuses the concepts; the standards discussions will be clearer if each concept is separately defined, and then consistent terms are used throughout CEA documents and training materials to state the intended good practice.

The concept of “significant progress relative to the norms of the field” is currently associated clearly enough with curriculum design in Curriculum 2; however, this concept is general and is not explained with examples except in Appendix A, which is available in the Accreditation and Reviewer Handbooks but not as part of the published standard discussion. In addition, more programs and institutions are adopting or revising curriculum to map against accepted scales as a way to document alignment with the “norms of the field.” This example is not included in Appendix A language.

Proposed changes

The intent that a curriculum must be designed to reflect significant progress has not changed. A given curriculum must be in writing, align with the mission of the program or institution, and include content that meets the assessed needs of the student population sought and enrolled. The content and levels of the curriculum must represent “significant progress relative to the norms of the field” for the educational program model and type of students served. Beyond these practices, the Task Force’s proposed changes to discussions incorporate relevant language giving examples of how “norms of the field” can be established and/or demonstrated; the examples are among frequently cited acceptable practices. Some language currently in Appendix A has been incorporated into the discussion. (As noted in Topic 1, the Task Force recommends that Appendix A be eliminated and remaining guidance be incorporated into workshop training.) Other changes throughout the standards discussions are editorial to consistently use “significant progress” and “significant progress relative to the norms of the field” to mean a quality of curriculum design and to differentiate this from how a student moves through the curriculum and program.

Regarding the standard itself, the proposed change captures the two parts of the standard discussion; only one part is currently in the standard statement.

Topic 3

Clarity and appropriate positioning within the standards of “normal/satisfactory student progress” as a matter of academic progression, academic advising, and regulatory compliance

The issues

As noted above, the CEA Standards state good practices relative to two concepts, one related to curriculum design and one to student movement within and through that curriculum and through the program. Throughout the standards (and in Appendix A in the Accreditation and Reviewer Handbooks), these two concepts are variously called satisfactory academic progress, significant academic progress, normal progress, significant progress or accomplishment, significant progress relative to the norms of the field, and so forth; SEVP and other actors in the field also use these terms variously.

The standards will be clearer if the concept of how a student moves through a curriculum and the program is clearly defined and consistently cited. In addition, the standards do not methodically and/or directly address several components of student movement through the curriculum and the program.

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For example, the standards do address matters of achievement and student progress within the boundaries of particular standards (such as Student Achievement 2 requiring direct evidence of achievement of student learning outcomes) but do not directly address or require sites to state policies related to attendance, repeating levels, or overall maximum time moving through a course of study. (At present, the only reference to attendance is as it relates to citation in student reports in Student Achievement 3, and in Appendix A where attendance is cited as indirect evidence of achievement.) There is no requirement that a site have a policy regarding repeating levels, and thus no guidance or reference to the amount of time a student may be in the course of study. Student Achievement 4 provides discussion of what information students should receive regarding assessment and progress and notes that the site “should have policies in place regarding a student’s failure to make satisfactory progress;” however, it appears that this belongs in Student Services and/or perhaps Administrative and Fiscal Capacity. Clarity as to what constitutes “normal progress” relative to SEVP requirements is also needed.

Proposed changes

Throughout the changes, the term “normal/satisfactory student progress” is now consistently used to indicate this concept. Also, a fundamental distinction is embedded in changes related to this topic to separate progress through the curriculum based on achievement of student learning outcomes from progress through the program as affected by “student engagement” matters such as attendance and effort. Specifically, the Task Force proposes three changes. Changes to Student Achievement standards address student progress through the educational program, including clarifications of what constitutes direct evidence of achievement and how this is reported to students. (See also Topics 1 and 4.) Changes to Administrative and Fiscal Capacity standards address the need to have stated policies on progression factors including policies on attendance, repeating levels, and maximum time in the course of study along with a rationale for each. (The Task Force may propose that this be a new standard, as there is no especially logical place for it within existing standards.) Statements regarding how progression through the program relates to compliance with SEVP regulations are also added. Changes to Student Services standards language reflect that students are counseled regarding both their success in the program relative to academic progress through the curriculum as well as progress through the program linked to other factors including attendance, immigration status if relevant, and counseling that F-1 students who do not meet the attendance, repeat, and maximum time policies are terminated.

Topic 4

Clarity of the role of concrete evidence, direct evidence, and indirect evidence in assessment, including a statement on CEA’s position on attendance and its relationship to the concepts above

The issues

Although the standards emphasize that direct evidence of achievement of Student Learning Outcomes as stated in a curriculum is required to meet SA 2 and is linked to SA 3 reporting, the descriptions of these kinds of evidence are not well defined. Further, the role of attendance, effort, and the completion of homework, and participation are not clearly established relative to these descriptions. There is no clear statement about how these factors can or should be accounted for on reports to students. As with the other topics, some language and information in Appendix A is relevant to descriptors of types of evidence but not all, and the most effective presentation of the information in Appendix A should be reviewed.

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Proposed changes

One proposed change is that the term “concrete evidence” be eliminated from the discussion in preference of direct evidence as opposed to indirect evidence with clear definitions of these two latter terms proposed in the Glossary. The Task Force agreed that, relative to individual student achievement, attendance, effort, and completion of homework are not appropriate forms of direct evidence and should not be incorporated into achievement scores or progression decisions. The Task Force agreed that indirect evidence of student achievement is valuable and necessary, and should be collected. The use of these terms was adjusted and made clearer within the standards discussions and Glossary for Commission consideration. The Task Force also agreed that, aside from its role in individual student achievement, attendance must be monitored so students can be counseled and to ensure that students meet regulatory requirements (see Topic Brief 3 for background and proposed changes regarding attendance and the establishment of “normal/satisfactory progress”).