

# **A Self-Assessment Primer for PreAccreditation**

## **Philosophical Perspectives of AACSB International Accreditation Standards and Some Suggested Focus Questions**

### **Disclaimer**

The sample questions provided illustrate the types of inquiries that can be directed to the PreAccreditation institution (and its various constituencies) to assist in the collecting, analyzing, and reporting of relevant data for the preparation of the Accreditation Plan; they facilitate the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and issues for further assessment during self-evaluation. These questions are just as applicable to business PreAccreditation as they are to accounting PreAccreditation. ***These are sample questions only and do not constitute a "checklist" or "procedure" to be satisfied in the PreAccreditation process.*** There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; they are not intended to be all inclusive. Questions are provided as a ***guide*** only; they are intended as an aid for the PreAccreditation Mentor in starting a dialogue with the PreAccreditation institution.

## **A Self-Assessment Primer for PreAccreditation Philosophical Perspectives of AACSB Accreditation Standards and Some Suggested Focus Questions**

The business and accounting accreditation standards adopted by the membership of AACSB International (AACSB) in April 2003 and April 2004, respectively, reflect the complex demands on management and accounting education, as well as organizations and managers. These challenges come from: (1) strong and growing global forces, (2) differences in organizational and cultural values, (3) cultural diversity among employees and customers, and (4) changing technology in products and processes. Prudence lies in diversity of approach and energetic experimentation. As a result, the dominant concepts that characterize the accreditation standards are: (1) the satisfaction of a moral dimension of business education through *strategic management* standards, (2) the assurance of the educational dimension of business education through *participants* standards, and (3) the assurance of the accountability dimension of business education through *assurance of learning* standards. These concepts are expressed as follows in the accreditation standards:

### **Strategic Management:**

The institution should articulate its mission as a guide to its view of the future, its planned evolution, and its infrastructure and strategic management of available resources. The accreditation evaluation process for an institution is linked to its mission. Each institution is faced with choices as a result of a wide range of opportunities and inevitable resource limitations. The development of a mission requires decisions regarding these alternatives, and the mission embodies these choices. Within each institution, decisions must be made regarding the relative emphasis across a number of dimensions.

Strategic management standards verify that the institution focuses its resources and efforts toward a defined mission as embodied in a mission statement. That mission statement may be broad or narrow, general or precise, but however it is stated it should assist the decision makers, implementers, students, and other constituencies of the institution to know the institution's goals. To satisfy the Strategic management standards, these choices must be documented.

### **Participants**

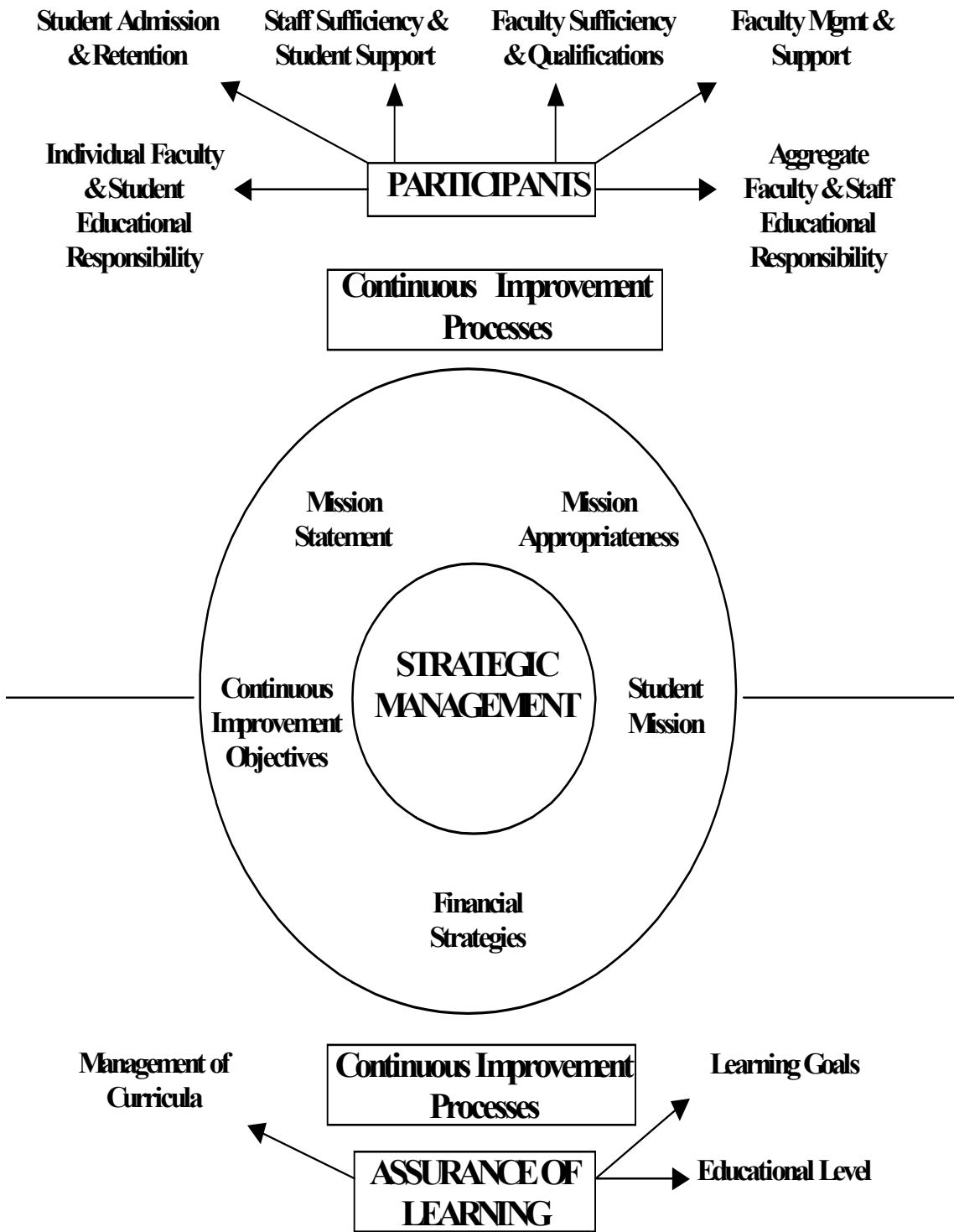
A direct link exists between a school's mission, the characteristics of students served by the educational programs, the composition and qualifications of the faculty members providing the programs, and the overall quality of the school. Therefore, these standards focus on maintaining a mix of both student and faculty participants that achieve high quality in the activities that support the school's mission.

Learning by students as they prepare for business, management, or academic careers is strongly dependent on the quality of instruction offered to them. Faculty members and administrators share responsibility for ensuring instructional quality through continuous improvement and innovation. As they implement this responsibility, faculty members, administrators, and staff continue their own learning. As participants in the learning enterprise, students also are responsible to take an active role in their learning experiences.

**Assurance of Learning:**

Student learning is the central activity of higher education. Definition of learning expectations and assurance that graduates achieve learning expectations are key features of any academic program. The learning expectations derive from a balance of internal and external contributions to the definition of educational goals. Members of the business community, students, and faculty members each contribute valuable perspectives on the needs of graduates. Learning goals should be set and revised at a level that encourages continuous improvement in educational programs.

Indeed the strategic management, participant and assurance of learning concepts are linked because processes that assure continuous improvement obviously relate to an institution being ever more successful in achieving its mission and strategic management goals. A conceptualization of these accreditation expectations is displayed below:



## **Strategic Management**

### **Intent of Strategic Management Standards**

Strategic management standards verify that the institution focuses its resources and efforts toward a defined mission as embodied in a mission statement. That mission statement may be broad or narrow, general or precise, but however it is stated, it should assist the decision makers, implementers, students and other constituents of the institution to know the institution's goals. The mission statement performs different functions for different constituencies. For decision makers, the mission statement captures the essence of their intentions. For implementers of an institution's programs, the mission statement brings coherence to activity and helps them to understand how a particular event fits into the broader institution aims.

A school's strategic management activity should complement the school's operations. Strategic management activities should generate documents valuable to the school. Strategic management should **not** consist of activities primarily undertaken to satisfy accreditation reviewers. If the pursuit of accreditation motivates the school to increased definition of its focus, that is good. But it is good only to the extent that the focus benefits the school, rather than being done only for the sake of achieving accreditation.

In whatever format it is practiced, strategic management should guide decisions and practice. Strategic management should enhance an understanding of the school among external constituencies.

### **Multiple Approaches to Strategic Management**

Schools may conduct their strategic management activity in many different ways. For some, setting strategic directions will involve precisely defined steps and detailed planning documents; for others, setting strategic directions will be an informal process resulting in more general, or overarching, statements of direction. Some schools will tie strategic management to specific directives and action items for individual activity; others will set more general goals and give great leeway to participants in the ways that they contribute toward the school's mission. No particular approach is inherently better than another; no particular planning model or technique is "correct."

### **Evaluation of Strategic Management**

The evaluation of a school's effectiveness depends on how well it marshals its resources and efforts toward its mission statement. As an enterprise higher education is accountable for its effectiveness in using its resources to transform the lives of its participants. Each school operates with a moral imperative to use its time, effort, and resources effectively to assure the opportunity for positive transformation in the lives of students and faculty. Accreditation review is concerned to see that positive results are fostered through capable strategic management.

## Characteristics of a Good Mission

What are the essential characteristics of a good mission? There would appear to be at least two:

1. Does the mission provide direction for making decisions?
  - The institution's mission must clarify how the mission statement assists in setting objectives and making management decisions for the institution.
2. Does the mission include viewpoints of various stakeholders?
  - The mission statement requires the participation of different salient viewpoints regarding the institution's goals.

## Relationship to the Accreditation Plan

The development of an Accreditation Plan normally would assume completion\* of the Strategic Management objectives since the self-assessment to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in continuous improvement processes (i.e., the Participant and Assurance of Learning standards) is mission-linked (i.e., the self-evaluation for accreditation must be done within the context of a institution's determined mission).

## Some Suggested Focus Questions

The following questions illustrate the types of inquiries that can be directed to the PreAccreditation institution (and its various constituencies) to assist in the collecting, analyzing and reporting relevant data for the preparation of the Accreditation Plan; they facilitate the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and issues during the self-assessment. These questions are just as applicable to business PreAccreditation as they are to accounting PreAccreditation. ***These are examples only and do not constitute a "checklist" or "procedure" to be satisfied in the PreAccreditation process.***

## Strategic Management Standards

- Does the PreAccreditation institution anticipate problems with the Strategic Management Standards and its expectations?
- Will improvement be required to satisfy accreditation requirements of the Strategic Management Standards and to foster continuous improvement? If so, the following questions will facilitate identification of areas of strengths and weaknesses (PreAccreditation Mentors should modify these questions to make them more useful and meaningful for their PreAccreditation institution):

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\* The intent is not to delay the start of self-evaluation of the continuous improvement processes until completion of the strategic management objectives; there could be concurrent development of the strategic management objectives and self-evaluation of the continuous improvement processes.

**Standard 1: Mission Statement**

- Does the PreAccreditation applicant have a mission statement that is published and periodically reviewed and revised as needed?
- Does the mission identify why the PreAccreditation applicant exists? Who do they serve (the relative emphasis given to each degree program, the types of students and other constituents served by degree programs, the geographic orientation of degree programs, and other non-degree stakeholders served)? What stakeholder needs do they satisfy (the educational objectives of clearly distinguishable degree programs and non-degree programs against which performance is evaluated)? How do they address stakeholder needs (the priorities and expectations of faculty related to teaching in degree programs, intellectual contributions, and service)?
- Is the mission/mission statement consistent with the institutional mission/mission statement and resources? What constituencies identified by the institutional mission does the PreAccreditation applicant serve? Who is the PreAccreditation applicant expected to serve within the institution? What is the current performance level?
- Does the mission development process provide for inputs from various constituencies? What is the faculty's role in the mission development and objective-setting process? Has the Advisory Council (business and/or accounting) played a role in mission development?
- Does the mission statement help stakeholders in setting priorities among potential initiatives?
- Does the mission statement help stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty members, students, employers, and business partners) know whether they can anticipate that the institution will fulfill its expectations?
- Does the mission statement drive decisions for uses and development of resources?
- Do the operations of the institution display the influence of the mission statement?
- Does the mission statement reflect the array of institutional activities?

**Standard 2: Mission Appropriateness**

- Is the mission/mission statement consistent with the institutional mission/mission statement and resources? What constituencies identified by the institutional mission does the PreAccreditation applicant serve? Who is the PreAccreditation applicant expected to serve within the institution? What is the current performance level?
- Does the mission development process provide for the orderly development of the mission/mission statement and educational goals of programs?

- Is the mission/mission statement appropriate to higher education for business and management? Does the mission emphasize the achievement of high quality in degree programs?
- Is the relative emphasis expected in Intellectual Contributions consistent with the PreAccreditation applicant's mission? Is basic scholarship, applied scholarship, and instructional development in appropriate balance?
- How do the current forms of faculty Intellectual Contributions relate to and support the institution's mission?

### **Standard 3: Student Mission**

- Does the mission specify the student populations the applicant intends to serve? What is the current performance level?

### **Standard 4: Continuous Improvement Objectives**

- Are there processes that produce information from periodic reassessment that activities are consistent with the mission and/or yield strategies to realign activities with the mission?
- Is there a process that leads to an "action" plan to achieve the PreAccreditation applicant's mission? Does the planning effort include goals for improvement?
- Does the mission identify what the PreAccreditation institution wants to become (the declaration of intent to attain a particular niche in management education and the core strategies to realize declared intent)?

### **Standard 5: Financial Strategies**

- Are there processes that provide data from periodic reassessment that resources are sufficient to achieve the mission and program objectives and/or yield strategies to acquire the needed resources?
- Does the mission statement drive decisions for uses and development of resources?

## Participants Standards

### Intent of Participants Standards

Participants standards substantiate the characteristics, interactions, and utilization of the human resources that constitute the learning community of the school. Participants and their interactions are at the center of much of what defines quality for higher education in business. Therefore, seeing that the proper processes are in place to secure and manage participant resources constitutes a key evaluation in assessing educational quality. The participants in a degree program (students, faculty members, staff, and administrators) are all part of a learning community playing out interacting roles in the educational process. This is true in traditional educational arrangements with face-to-face interactions on an institutional campus, and it is equally true in more recent, technology-mediated education where some, or all, of the interactions take place electronically. All of the participants are co-producers of learning.

These Participants standards assess quality in the educational process regardless of the variety of:

- Pedagogy or communication technologies utilized.
- Contractual arrangements of participants to the institution.
- Methods of dividing the components of the educational tasks among faculty members and staff.

Reviewers must make essential judgments concerning whether the intellectual resources among the participants reach the level required for quality higher education, whether the processes that manage participant resources honor the school's mission, and whether quality is maintained in implementation of the school's programs. Where schools use nontraditional resources for faculty or arrange interactions in nontraditional ways, the burden is on the school to demonstrate that it maintains educational quality.

### Some Suggested Focus Questions

The following questions illustrate the types of inquiries that can be directed to the PreAccreditation applicant (and its various constituencies) to assist in the collecting, analyzing, and reporting relevant data for the preparation of the Accreditation Plan; they facilitate the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and issues during the self-assessment. These questions are just as applicable to business PreAccreditation as they are to accounting PreAccreditation. ***These are examples only and do not constitute a "checklist" or "procedure" to be satisfied in the PreAccreditation process.***

### Participant Standards

- Does the PreAccreditation institution anticipate problems with the Participants Standards and its expectations?
- Will improvement in the area of the Participants Standard be required to satisfy accreditation requirements and foster continuous improvement? If so, the following questions will facilitate identification of areas of strengths and weaknesses

(PreAccreditation Mentors should modify these questions to make them more useful and meaningful for the PreAccreditation institution):

### **Standard 6: Student Admission**

- Are there policies/processes for student recruitment and selection that lead to the admission of students consistent with the PreAccreditation applicant's mission and programmatic objectives? (It is recognized that the institution must operate within conditions created by requirements set by the governing board, college or university policies, characteristics of the institution pool, and availability of financial aid, etc.; the mission of the PreAccreditation institution and thus student recruitment and selection must be consistent with the achievement of high quality within its circumstances).
- Are the undergraduate and master's admissions standards consistent with the PreAccreditation applicant's goals?
- What types of students do degree programs attract? Is the quality of the student consistent with degree program objectives?
- Do admission policies/processes/programs demonstrate that the combination of indicators used in making admission decisions yield results consistent with the objective of producing high-quality graduates (provide data concerning the admission pool, those admitted, and those who have enrolled and their performance)?
- Which degree programs are currently experiencing the largest enrollment growth or decline? What implications are drawn from these trends?
- Are there special efforts under way to recruit women and minority students? How successful have these efforts been?

### **Standard 7: Student Retention**

- What types of students do degree programs attract? Is the quality of the student consistent with degree program objectives?
- Are retention policies consistent with the objective of producing well-prepared graduates? To what extent is assistance provided to students who have academic difficulty?

### **Standard 8: Staff Sufficiency - Student Support**

- Are there policies/processes for the delivery of academic counseling? How soon after initial enrollment are academic counseling opportunities offered to students? Are these services adequate?

- Are there policies/processes/programs for the delivery of career planning and placement services? How soon after initial enrollment are career and placement counseling opportunities offered to students? Are these services adequate?
- Is data generated on student placement and career progress that facilitates evaluation of degree program objectives?

**Standard 9: Faculty Sufficiency**

- Is there a faculty resource plan addressing the adequacy of faculty sufficiency and qualifications?
- Does the PreAccreditation applicant maintain a faculty sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement for the instructional programs offered? Are the faculty sufficient in numbers to perform curriculum development, course development, course delivery, assessment of learning and other activities that support the instructional goals of the applicant's mission?
- Are curriculum design, course development, course delivery and assessment of learning conducted by persons with suitable academic and/or experience credentials?
- Does the deployment of faculty resources reflect the mission and programs?
- Do participating faculty members deliver at least 75 percent of the applicant's teaching?
- Do participating faculty members deliver at least 60 percent of the teaching in each degree program and in each discipline?
- Is there a faculty resource planning process?
- Are faculty resources and faculty management consonant with the applicant's stated mission and objectives?
- Are the student-faculty interaction principles met?

**Standard 10: Faculty Qualifications**

- Is there a faculty resource plan addressing the adequacy of faculty sufficiency and qualifications?
- What are the expectations for faculty intellectual contributions?
- Is there a faculty development plan/program consistent with intellectual contributions expectations?

- Are at least 90 percent of the faculty resources either academically or professionally qualified?
- Are at least 50 percent of the faculty resources academically qualified?
- Is the portfolio of current capabilities for all faculty members sufficient to support the high quality performance of all activities in support of the applicant's mission?
- Is the distribution of qualified faculty resources across programs and disciplines consistent with the applicant's mission?
- How does the applicant evaluate faculty member contributions to the mission?
- What are the expectations for maintenance of faculty qualifications?
- Is the distribution of academically and professionally qualified faculty resources across programs and disciplines consistent with the applicant's mission and the students' needs?

#### **Standard 11: Faculty Management and Support**

- Is there a faculty resource planning process?
- Is the faculty promotion, retention, and tenure process consistent with intellectual contributions expectations?
- Does the faculty resource planning process reflect the applicant's teaching, intellectual contribution, and service obligation?
- Is there a faculty recruitment and selection process? What has been the recent accept/reject history for offers extended to potential faculty members? What factors attract faculty to this institution?
- Is the faculty recruitment and selection process consistent with the faculty resource plan?
- Does the faculty recruitment and selection process give appropriate consideration to demographic diversity?
- Is there a faculty orientation process that communicates the applicant's performance expectations and available support infrastructure?
- Does the faculty deployment process reflect the applicant's mission and degree program obligations (serve adequately students in all degree programs)? How are faculty assigned to evening courses? Off-campus courses? What is the process for ensuring that faculty deployment decisions support effective instruction?
- Does the faculty development process reflect the applicant's mission emphasis dimensions (teaching, intellectual contributions, and service)? Has a carefully conceived strategy been

undertaken to assist the faculty in achieving its intellectual contributions objectives? Is it working? What assistance is available? Is this support adequate?

- Is there a faculty development plan/program that integrates the other faculty processes to assure that expectations and support are in appropriate balance?
- Are there processes/programs for course development, effective teaching, and instructional innovations? To what extent do faculty bring examples of current research into the classroom? Does the applicant have an adequate level of innovation in its teaching and scholarship?
- Is there a faculty mentoring program?
- Are there programs for faculty participation in academic and professional organizations?
- Are there policies governing outside activities of faculty?
- Is there a process that results in formal and periodic faculty performance evaluation? Have faculty evaluation forms completed by students made any difference? If evaluation forms don't exist, should they?
- Does the faculty promotion, retention, and tenure process reflect the applicant's mission emphasis dimensions?
- Is the faculty promotion, retention, and tenure process consistent with the other faculty processes and programs assuring that expectations and support are in appropriate balance? Do the prevailing standards for faculty selection, development, promotion, tenure, salary, etc., support the mission?

### **Standard 12: Aggregate Faculty and Staff Educational Responsibility**

- Is there a process/program for the ongoing improvement and integration of instructional support resources?
- Are instructional resources sufficient and managed to carry out the applicant's mission and programmatic goals? Off-campus programs? To what extent are computers available for student use? To what extent do the library and its services meet the needs for those serviced?
- Are there policies/processes to assure that instructional support resources are utilized as planned? To what extent is the computer used in business courses? To what extent is library usage required in business courses?
- Is there a process for effective creation and delivery of instruction? Regular examination of course syllabi to assure consistency with institution/programmatic goals? Coordination of multi-section course offerings to assure consistency with course goals? Monitoring of library and other information resources in course assignments and in student activities?

- Is the "instructional effectiveness" process integrated with and consistent with the "instructional support resources" process?

### **Standard 13: Individual Faculty Educational Responsibility**

- Are there processes through which faculty observe business practices in action?
- What programs or strategies have been designed to encourage faculty involvement with the business community? Are they working?
- Does the applicant have processes to support, encourage and assess faculty members in their own knowledge development?
- Do the applicant's programs actively involve students in the learning process?
- Do the applicant's programs involve feedback? If so, how?
- How are faculty members expected to maintain currency and relevancy in their applicable fields?

### **Standard 14: Student Educational Responsibility**

- Do students actively engage learning materials with the appropriate attention and dedication?
- Do students have the opportunity to work together on some learning tasks?
- How does the applicant show that students meet the learning goals for their respective degree programs?

## **Assurance of Learning**

### **Intent of Assurance of Learning Standards**

Assurance of Learning Standards evaluate how well the school accomplishes the educational aims at the core of its activities. The learning process is separate from the demonstration that students achieve learning goals. Do students achieve learning appropriate to the programs in which they participate? Do they have the knowledge and skills appropriate to their earned degrees? Because of differences in mission, student population, employer population, and other circumstances, the program learning goals will differ from school to school. Every school should enunciate and measure its educational goals. Few characteristics of the school will be as important to stakeholders as knowing the accomplishment levels of the school's students when compared against the school's learning goals.

Assurance of learning to demonstrate accountability (such as in accreditation) is an important reason to assess learning accomplishments. Measures of learning can assure external constituents such as potential students, trustees, public officials, supporters, and accreditors, that the organization meets its goals.

Another important function for measures of learning is to assist the school and faculty members to improve programs and courses. By measuring learning the school can evaluate its students' success at achieving learning goals, can use the measures to plan improvement efforts, and (depending on the type of measures) can provide feedback and guidance for individual students.

As an initial and critical step in its demonstration of learning, the school must develop a list of the learning goals for which it will demonstrate assurance of learning. This list of learning goals derives from, or is consonant with, the school's mission. The mission and objectives set out the intentions of the school, and the learning goals say how the degree programs demonstrate the mission. That is, the learning goals describe the desired educational accomplishments of the degree programs. The learning goals translate the more general statement of the mission into the educational accomplishments of graduates.

### **Intent of Learning Goals**

Learning goals serve two purposes. First, learning goals convey to participants, faculty and students, the educational outcomes toward which they are working. This helps in setting priorities and emphasis, designing learning experiences, and fulfilling educational expectations. While the learning goals cannot be exhaustively stated for any higher education program, it is possible to set educational targets and to assure that the learning is progressing in the specified direction. Second, educational goals assist potential students to choose programs that fit their personal career goals. Only with an accurate understanding of the learning goals will a potential student be able to make an informed choice about whether to join the program.

### **Some Suggested Focus Questions**

The following questions illustrate the types of inquiries that can be directed to the PreAccreditation institution (and its various constituencies) to assist in the collecting, analyzing, and reporting relevant data for the preparation of the Accreditation Plan; they facilitate the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and issues during the self-assessment. These questions are just as applicable to business PreAccreditation as they are to accounting PreAccreditation. ***These are examples only and do not constitute a "checklist" or "procedure" to be satisfied in the PreAccreditation process.***

- Does the PreAccreditation applicant anticipate problems with the Assurance of Learning Standards and its expectations?
- Will improvement in the area of the Assurance of Learning Standards be required to satisfy accreditation requirements and foster continuous improvement? If so, the following questions will facilitate identification of areas of strengths and weaknesses (PreAccreditation Mentors should modify these questions to make them more useful and meaningful for the PreAccreditation institution):

**Standard 15: Management of Curricula**

- What mechanisms exist for the assessment of consistency with the Assurance of Learning standards? How do degree programs achieve integration of core areas and include application of cross-functional approaches to organizational issues? To what extent has the international dimension been emphasized in courses? To what extent have courses raised issues about managing in culturally diverse environments?
- Are there processes/policies for evaluation of instructional effectiveness (student, peer, and/or alumni evaluation of teaching) and student achievement (learning outcomes assessment, placement results, and alumni evaluation)?
- Is there a process for the linkage of teaching performance (annual performance evaluation) to the PreAccreditation institution's mission (instructional objectives) and program objectives?
- Is there a curriculum planning process for the orderly development of curricula aimed at realization of the applicant's mission? Do any degree requirements seem to lack a well-conceived basis?
- What is the process for review and revision of the curricula? What are recent actions? Are you satisfied with the current curricula? What curricular revisions are overdue?
- Is there periodic implementation of revisions to reflect new objectives and improvements in contemporary theory and practice and teaching techniques?
- Is there a process/program for the assessment of educational outcomes in light of stated degree program objectives?
- Is there a process for the review of placement results in light of stated degree program objectives? How effective is the applicant in placing its graduates?
- Does the curriculum review process provide information from stakeholders on graduates' performance in light of stated objectives? To what extent is the business community satisfied with the results produced by the applicant?

**Standard 16: Undergraduate Learning Goals**

- Does the applicant specify, define, and demonstrate the achievement of learning goals in each undergraduate degree program?
- What are the learning goals for each undergraduate degree program?
- How does the applicant show that students meet all of the learning goals for undergraduate degree programs?

**Standard 17: Undergraduate Educational Level**

- Do undergraduate degree programs provide sufficient time, content coverage, student effort, and student-faculty interaction to assure that the learning goals are accomplished?

**Standard 18: Master's Level General Management Learning Goals**

- Does the applicant specify, define and demonstrate the achievement of learning goals in each master's level general management program?
- What are the learning goals for each master's level general management program?
- How does the applicant show that students meet all of the learning goals for master's level general management programs?

**Standard 19: Specialized Master's Degree Learning Goals**

- Does the applicant specify, define and demonstrate the achievement of learning goals in each specialized master's degree program?
- What are the learning goals for each specialized master's program?
- How does the applicant show that students meet all of the learning goals for specialized master's programs?

**Standard 20: Master's Educational Level**

- Do master's level degree programs provide sufficient time, content coverage, student effort, and student-faculty interaction to assure that the learning goals are accomplished?

**Standard 21: Doctoral Learning Goals**

- What are the research expectations for doctoral students?
- What are the learning goals for each doctoral program?
- How does the applicant show that students meet all of the learning goals for doctoral programs?