



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **INTERPRETATIONS TO THE *PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION***

### **Interpretation of Core Requirement 8.1 (*Student achievement*)**

Core Requirement 8.1 reads:

**The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution’s mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success.**  
*(Student achievement)* [CR]

#### ***Interpretation:***

Member institutions are expected to demonstrate their success with respect to student achievement and indicate the criteria and thresholds of acceptability used to determine that success. The criteria are the items to be measured (and published); the thresholds of acceptability are the minimal expectations set by the institution to define its own acceptable level of achievement (i.e., a minimum target). The institution is responsible for justifying both the criteria it utilizes and the thresholds of acceptability it sets. The items measured and the thresholds of acceptability should be consistent with the institution’s mission and the students it serves.

In their reviews, SACSCOC committees will examine and analyze (1) documentation demonstrating success with respect to student achievement, (2) the appropriateness of criteria and thresholds of acceptability used to determine student achievement, and (3) whether the data and other information to document student achievement is appropriately published.

While this standard does not ask what the institution does when it finds it falls short of its own expectations, institutions not meeting their self-identified thresholds of performance would be expected to document efforts to meet expectations.

#### **Graduation Rates**

The standard requires the institution to use “multiple measures to document student success.” SACSCOC expects one of those measures to be graduation rates. Every member institution has been asked to identify

the indicator it will use to evaluate graduation rates (IPEDS Graduation Rate, IPEDS 8 Year Outcomes, National Student Clearinghouse Total Completion Rate, or SACSCOC Institutional Profile). The chosen indicator allows an institution to establish a baseline and compare its current performance with other peer institutions. At the same time, the institution was expected to establish appropriate and reasonable targets related to graduation rates and student achievement.

Member institutions which are preparing a compliance certification for review during the reaffirmation process or review by a Fifth-Year Interim Committee must address graduation rates – using the chosen indicator – when providing a narrative and supporting documentation for Core Requirement 8.1 (*Student achievement*). Institutions whose graduation rates fall below appropriate and acceptable institutional targets should also discuss ongoing institutional strategies to seek improvement. Institutions which only serve graduate and professional students were not asked to select one of the indicators noted above; they are, however, expected to address graduation rate as part of their discussion of student achievement.

In order to maximize institutional effectiveness in the area of student achievement goals, member institutions should also disaggregate graduation rate data by appropriate demographics. Those demographic characteristics typically include gender, race, ethnicity, and Pell/Non-Pell status. Institutions may also disaggregate graduation rate data by other student population characteristics. If any categories that are not standard are used, the institution should include definitions. For the various types of disaggregation, the institution should provide a rationale for their use. Institutions should, as a result of the analysis of such disaggregated data, report any ongoing institutional strategies to seek improvement in closing completion gaps among student populations when addressing compliance with this standard.

**Document History**

*Approved: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, December 2019*

*Revised: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2024*