

## INTERPRETATIONS TO THE *PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION*

### Interpretation of Standard 8.2.a (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)

Standard 8.2.a reads:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.

(*Student outcomes: educational programs*)

#### ***Interpretation***

Many SACSCOC member institutions offer so-called “transfer” associate’s degree programs (Associate of Arts, Associate of Science) which consist primarily of general education coursework designed to prepare students for pursuing a baccalaureate degree. The comprehensive nature of these degree programs makes them educational programs, even though they often contain no cohort of courses which would comprise a major sequence. Because they are considered educational programs, they should be addressed in the institution’s case for compliance with Standard 8.2.a (*Student learning: educational programs*). In many cases, the learning outcomes for such programs may also correspond closely to the institution’s identified student learning outcomes for its general education coursework [Standard 8.2.b (*Student outcomes: general education*)].

Historically, the distinction between an Associate of Arts degree program and an Associate of Science degree program lies in a slight difference of emphasis. Associate of Arts programs have traditionally emphasized courses in the arts and humanities (including foreign language study), while Associate of Science programs have traditionally placed more emphasis on mathematics, laboratory science, and the social and behavioral sciences. If an institution’s associate’s degree programs maintain that historical distinction, review committees might reasonably assume that the identified student learning outcomes would be the same for both programs. Such degree programs would tend to emphasize generalizable learning skills in preparation for further coursework at the undergraduate level, including general historical, mathematical, and scientific knowledge, as well as oral and written communication, information literacy, analytical and critical thinking, and cultural literacy.

If, however, an institution’s AA and AS degree programs contain a coherent and significant cohort of courses that appear to be a “major” sequence, review committees might reasonably expect the institution to consider each iteration of its AA and AS degrees to be separate educational programs. This is particularly true when the institution captures these distinctions in official documents (catalog, transcript, diploma, website). In such instances, the institution’s case for compliance with Standard 8.2.a (*Student learning: educational programs*) should include an analysis of each of these AA/AS programs. Reviewers might reasonably expect a “core” set of student learning

outcomes that would apply to all AA and AS degrees, but each individual program should also be addressing the effectiveness of its “major” sequence with appropriate student learning outcomes.

**Document History**

*Approved: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2020*