



SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

More flexible--and forgiving--than advertised

We hear about SACSCOC requirements for a reason. Our accrediting body has rules and regulations we **must** follow.



BUT. . .

We also hear about SACSCOC when there is no specific accreditation requirement--like when faculty were told SACSCOC required the assessment of stand-alone minors.

Six of one, half a dozen of the other?

Most recently, we've been told that SACSCOC standard 9.1 is met (or proved) by our 50% rule.

Well, to be fair, we were told that *after* we discovered that the rule was not required by the CPE. There was sometime, in the hoary past, when CPE purportedly specified something in the realm of 50% for another thing (that may or may not have been curriculum), but now the rule is the institutions way of meeting SACSCOC standard 9.1: "Educational programs (a) embody a coherent course of study, (b) are compatible with the stated mission and goals, and (c) are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education."



Is it though?



Well, it *could be*, but it is clearly not our only option. We all filled out curriculum maps a few years back, linking course specific SLOs to program competencies to meet the requirements of SACSCOC standard 9.1.

And we only did that after Senate leadership intervened to ensure that we all wouldn't have to create new Type I proposals for every single course in the catalogue.

So there are clearly a range of options, and a 50% rule is but one option to meet part of a fairly flexible standard.

And, it should be noted, there's no direct connection between our 50% rule and what SACSCOC, in its rationale and notes, specifies as coherence.

All programs offered by the institution are directly connected to its mission and to fields of study appropriate to higher education. The term “coherence” in this standard reflects an expectation that, as a student progresses through a program of study, the content of the program demands increasing levels of integration of knowledge. Coherence is a critical component of a program and should demonstrate an appropriate sequencing of courses, not a mere bundling of credits, so that student learning is progressively more advanced in terms of assignments and scholarship required and demonstrates progressive advancement in a field of study that allows students to integrate knowledge and grow in critical skills.

Curriculum mapping with outcome linkage immediately and graphically meets SACSCOC's definition of “coherence” (a definition available on p. 76 of the current Manual).

Do we need a Senate-led “Learning Cafe” re: SACSCOC?

Senate, the body that determined institutional assessment of stand-alone minors was statistically and pedagogically unsound, generated [guidelines for streamlining assessment](#) when it passed its resolution re: the assessment of minors in January 2020.

In August 2020, Senate provided all faculty with a [Sharepoint of relevant accreditation and assessment information](#) (for SACSCOC, CPE, and Performance Funding).

Fall 2021, Academic Issues is discovering that a great many problems can be traced to the institution’s failure to fully follow SACSCOC standard 10.4.

SACSCOC standard 10.4, on SHARED GOVERNANCE

“The institution (a) publishes and implements policies on the authority of faculty in academic and governance matters, (b) demonstrates that educational programs for which academic credit is awarded are approved consistent with institutional policy, and (c) places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty.”

While we publish policies on the authority of faculty (10.4.a) and demonstrate programs are consistent with institutional policy (10.4.b), **we do not always place the primary responsibility of the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with the faculty (10.4.c)**. This mis- or dis-placement occurs when we fail to properly *implement* our own policies (see 10.4.a).

Problem #1: Manufactured Assessment Mandates

To cite recent examples, faculty were told

- SACSCOC required the assessment of stand-alone minors
- CPE required the use of the AAC&U [VALUE rubrics](#) to show MSU's Gen Ed was in compliance with [LEAP](#)

Neither was true.

Even more importantly, neither option allowed faculty to effectively demonstrate the quality or effectiveness of the curricula. The assessment of minors was statistically unsound and the VALUE rubrics were not uniformly suited to our new General Education SLOs.

The proposed (and in one case, imposed) “mandates” violate standard 10.4.c.

Problem #2: Manufactured Consent

Faculty have been complying with a “50% rule” because we have been told external agencies require it. But. . .

There is no CPE mandate. (And, if the 50% rule were required by CPE, there would be documentation from the CPE demonstrating as such.)

There is no SACSCOC mandate. (And, if the 50% rule helped the institution meet SACSCOC standard 9.1, then every program currently on campus would meet the rule.)

And yet, this rule is still used as a gatekeeping device for new program review, all because a former committee of faculty, having been told the 50% rule was required by an external entity, approved the rule.

Manufactured consent is not full consent, and it does not demonstrate faculty control of or responsibility for the curriculum.

When the problems themselves cohere: FYS

How FYS became a problem with shared governance:

- When the upper administration dissolved the old QEP, they dissolved a course attached to the QEP but not coterminous with it, the old iteration of FYS.
- The faculty who approved the new FYS were told it was a temporary solution to a “core” problem as the institution revised General Education.
- The original Gen Ed revision (LUX) **did not** include FYS as a credit bearing course.
- The final approved revision of Gen Ed included FYS ***with the understanding that the course would eventually be returned to faculty control.***

When the problems themselves cohere: FYS con't

Why the current FYS is not in compliance with SACSCOC standard 10.4:

- The (pre-Gen Ed reform) approval of FYS does not follow our standard protocol or policy for course approval (the same administrator signs off/approves in more than one review level--it is possible that no one noticed because this administrator is the gatekeeper for all curricular paperwork and no one really cared to look closely because this new version was a “stop gap” solution). (Violates 10.4.b.)
- Three hours of *academic credit* in the General Education core are currently under the control of one administrator, who relies on fractionalized staff persons to teach the course. (Violates 10.4.c.)

FYS does NOT meet the “Rationale and Notes” for standard 10.4, specified on p. 94 of the Manual:

Institutional policies concerning the role of faculty in academic matters should make clear that the faculty has primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum. Documentation should include evidence that faculty actively assume these responsibilities. While department chairs may take a major role in these processes, the evidence should show broad faculty involvement in what are considered fundamental faculty roles.

Inviting 4-5 faculty to contribute content for a course that a curriculum committee is told is “temporary” is **not** demonstrating “broad faculty involvement in what are considered fundamental faculty roles.” Allowing a Senate-approved FYS committee description to languish on upper administrative desks for 1.5+ years does not signal “faculty has primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness” of 3 hours in the academic core of General Education.



And “better” begins with the institution upholding standard 10.4, not creating more confusion and paper compliance.



For spreading the word about SACSCOC and get the administration to work *with us* on assessment processes that will streamline efforts and mitigate misreadings. (Because we can stop unnecessary work and overcompliance!)