



Voluntary
Framework of
Accountability

**COMMUNITY
COLLEGE MEASURES
of **EFFECTIVENESS****

ABOUT THE VFA

The Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) is the first comprehensive national accountability system created *by* community colleges, *for* community colleges. Community college leaders—facilitated by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)—conceived, developed, and pilot-tested the VFA metrics.

Existing accountability measures in higher education do not adequately measure the unique mission of community colleges. For example, existing measures may exclude part-time students or non-credit career and technical students who are a key part of community colleges' mission. In light of the inadequacy of existing measures, the VFA stands to provide community colleges with a significantly improved ability to assess their performance, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate their commitment to their mission.

The VFA has three parts: measures of student progress and outcomes; measures of workforce, economic, and community development; and an approach for assessing student learning outcomes. These three parts are described in detail inside this brochure. AACC has made the VFA metrics available to all colleges and will provide an online data display tool in 2013.

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STUDENT PROGRESS & OUTCOMES

Determining how and whether students are fulfilling their educational objectives—both among students who intend to obtain a credential and among students who take courses without intending to obtain a credential—is essential to a comprehensive community college accountability framework. The Student Progress and Outcomes (SPO) measures evaluate the short-term progress and long-term outcomes of all students who begin their studies at a college in a given time period, disaggregated by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and financial aid status.

The SPO shorter-term metrics assess how effectively colleges are moving students through developmental education sequences, given that most students who begin their studies at community colleges require developmental courses, which are essential to future educational success. Beyond developmental education, colleges need to be able to assess how well students persist in their education. The SPO shorter-term metrics therefore assess how effectively colleges help students reach key educational milestones.

Finally, the SPO longer-term metrics identify the outcomes among all students in a given cohort six years after they started at the college. This timeframe recognizes that many community college students attend on a less than full-time basis, but is still timely enough to provide useful internal and external policy guidance.

Metrics

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRESS MEASURES

% of students referred who attempted their first math, English, or reading developmental education course

% of students referred who completed highest level math, English, or reading developmental education course

% of students referred who completed any college-level course in math, English, or reading

% of students referred who completed all developmental education

% of students who were retained from fall (term one) to their next academic term or completed a formal award;

% of students who reached year two outcomes as follows:

- Completed certificate or degree
- Transferred to a 2-year or 4-year institution
- Still enrolled at initial institution

% of credit hours successfully completed by cohort at end of year two

TWO-YEAR PROGRESS MEASURES

% of credit hours successfully completed by cohort in the first term

% of students who reached credit thresholds by end of year two (24 credits for part-time; 42 for full-time)

SIX-YEAR OUTCOMES MEASURES

(These outcomes are non-duplicative, mutually exclusive)

% of students who earned an associate's degree—without transfer

% of students who earned an associate's degree—with transfer

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WORKFORCE, ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Metrics

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MEASURES

Number of awards in CTE

Licensure exam passing rate

% of CTE students that complete a program (both credit and non-credit) or earned 90 contact hours and are employed with a livable wage

Median wage growth of CTE students

NON-CREDIT WORKFORCE COURSES

Non-credit workforce course enrollments

Number of state/industry-recognized credentials

% of non-credit CTE students that transition from non-credit to credit courses

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION / GED

% of students that completed ABE / GED

% of ABE/GED students that enrolled in additional education

% of ABE/GED students that gained employment

Workforce, Economic, and Community Development (WECD) measures will enable community colleges to better gauge their efficacy in meeting their communities' workforce needs—a vital part of every community college's mission. These measures are unique to the VFA and include two subsets of metrics: one for Career and Technical Education (CTE) and one for Adult Basic Education (ABE).

The CTE measures assess the outcomes of students who complete career and technical education programs or take a minimum number of credit or non-credit CTE hours. The CTE measures determine the value of the education for the individual by examining job placement and comparing earnings pre- and post-education. There is no national definition for CTE programs or standards for measuring non-credit activities; as such, the VFA's CTE metrics are an attempt to create national definitions that all community colleges can begin to use.

Adult Basic Education is a critical part of what many community colleges do. The VFA includes initial metrics that begin to examine student outcomes in this area. The ABE metrics will require refinement as colleges do more to track students and more data become available.

% of students who earned an award of less than associate's degree (certificate)—with transfer

% of students who earned an award of less than associate's degree (certificate)—without transfer

% of students who transferred to another post-secondary institution, with no degree or certificate

% of students who were still enrolled during the sixth academic year

% of students who left institution without an award and without transfer having earned 30 or more semester credit hours (or equivalent)

% of students who left institution without an award and without transfer having earned less than 30 semester credit hours (or equivalent)

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STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Educators and policymakers are engaged in a robust debate about how to assess quality in higher education—that is, determining what students learn, know, and can do as a result of their studies. This debate includes discussions about the definitions of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) themselves; the efficacy of specific assessment practices for measuring learning; and the fundamental purposes of assessment, such as institutional accountability or classroom improvement.

For the developers of the VFA, the challenge for assessing SLO is to find an approach that both respects the broad diversity among community colleges and is appropriate as an institutional assessment of quality. Guiding this effort is the principle that community colleges will be served best by measures that are designed by—or at least adapted to—the community college sector.

The VFA takes a phased approach to assessing SLO. Initially, the VFA will bring more transparency to how colleges assess and report SLO by providing a web-based format to capture the college's SLO work. This format is based on the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) Transparency Framework. The framework identifies six key areas for reporting:

- student learning outcomes statements
- assessment plans
- assessment resources
- current assessment activities
- evidence of student learning
- use of student learning evidence.

More information on the NILOA Transparency Framework is available on its website.

Increased transparency is a necessary first step, but on its own it does not represent a sufficient approach to assessing and reporting SLO, particularly

since it does not provide a mechanism for comparing institutions with one another or with an external benchmark. Therefore, community college leaders involved in developing the VFA will continue to evaluate approaches for a better system to assess and report SLO. The first step will be to examine the utility of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), recently developed with funding from the Lumina Foundation for Education, as an initial approach for developing an institution-level learning outcomes framework.

The VFA is committed to providing a pathway towards assessing and reporting SLO in a manner that is useful to the sector, recognizing the many variations among institutions but striving to provide consistency and comparability.

GET INVOLVED

Learn more about the VFA by visiting www.aacc.nche.edu/vfa, signing up for a webinar, and reading VFA publications.

Inform colleagues at your institution and at other institutions about the VFA.

Consult the VFA Metrics Manual to determine what data are available to your institution or are needed, and how to calculate the measures.

Start using the VFA measures on your campus.



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