

## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL ALIGNMENT TO ACCREDITATION

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The Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) helps colleges identify strengths and areas for improvement in light of best practices in seven key areas: 1) Leadership and Vision; 2) Data and Technology; 3) Equity; 4) Teaching and Learning; 5) Engagement and Communication; 6) Strategy and Planning; and 7) Policies and Practices. The tool provides a structure for stakeholders from all areas of a college to collectively examine critical elements necessary to drive equitable student outcomes.

The ICAT also provides colleges with additional benefits related to their accreditation cycle. The seven regional accrediting agencies have some variation in accreditation standards or criteria but all have adopted a cycle or process (often referred to as “closing the loop”) for colleges to use through the self-study or compliance certification process.



That process includes:

- identifying goals or outcomes in each unit or department of the college;
- establishing “acceptable” levels of performance or expected outcomes or benchmarks;
- using some form of assessment of performance;
- analyzing and discussing the results of the assessment among relevant stakeholders;
- using the analysis of results to inform action, improve instructional programs and support services, make changes to policy, and establish appropriate interventions;
- demonstrating improvements in student performance, completion, stated outcomes, and institutional quality.

Some of the accrediting agencies want colleges to use more than one form of assessment and/or both qualitative and quantitative measures in the process or cycle of initial accreditation or reaffirmation. The ICAT can provide an additional assessment tool that produces a numeric result with qualitative feedback from faculty and staff who participate in accreditation processes. While the ICAT is not intended to be a psychometric tool, it can stimulate broad-based discussion and analysis. It is a helpful tool in facilitating consensus and promoting change and improvement.

### Alignment to the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool

The following are ways colleges can align the ICAT with accreditation:

- As an externally developed assessment tool that is used nationally and can be used as a pre-test/post-test measure. Colleges that choose to use the ICAT can conduct the assessment early in their accreditation cycle (preferable by midpoint, e.g. year five in a ten year cycle), facilitate forums with key groups and committees across the college to discuss

the findings, develop strategies to move the institution forward in specific areas and monitor progress. The college can then re-administer the assessment later as a post-test measure. Faculty, staff, and administrators who participate in the pre and post assessments will provide results that can be used as “data” to inform practice and make decisions.

- B.** As an environmental scanning tool to produce broad areas of focus for strategic planning. Colleges often conduct some form of external environmental scan in the first few steps of their strategic planning process but do not always have an effective tool to conduct internal scanning. Because the ICAT assesses strengths and areas for improvement, the results of the assessment can provide direction for the development of a strategic plan, support for prioritization and allocation of resources and suggestions for the implementation of the plan.
- C.** As a facilitator of broad engagement and critical discussions about institutional issues. Colleges often find it difficult to engage large numbers of faculty and staff in the accreditation process and when the visiting team arrives on campus, some college employees are not aware of the critical issues facing the institution or the strategies developed to improve institutional quality. The process of completing the ICAT and discussing the results, combined with analysis of data, can enable broad-based involvement and discussion that stimulate changes in policy, practices, classroom strategies, student services, and budget allocation.
- D.** As a venue for discussion, analysis, and strategy to determine the quality issues the college faces. All accrediting commissions use terms such as “improvements in institutional quality” or “improving the quality and effectiveness of programs and services.” Colleges need to identify and address improvements in institutional quality not only in instructional programs but across all areas of the college. All commissions also ask for regular evaluation of programs and services. The ICAT encourages broad engagement in the assessment and analysis of the college’s capacity in multiple areas and the scores can be used as documentation of needs for improvement in institutional quality.
- E.** As a tool to address the change in focus toward more equitable student outcomes. While student success has always been a concern of the accrediting commissions, the national focus on completion has taken on a new level of importance. Over the last few years, all of the higher education commissions within the regional accrediting agencies have added new standards relating to student success. They are now requiring colleges to address issues such as retention, course and program completion, and other measures of student success. They are interested in disaggregated data, equity, subgroups of the population, and success through all delivery methods. While there is some variation in these new standards among agencies, they are more alike than different. The following identify by commission their requirements for student success benchmarks, analysis and action.

  - 1. Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MS-CHE)** - An accredited institution demonstrates: consideration and use of assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness. Consistent with the institution’s mission, such uses include: improving key indicators of student success, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates (**V.3.g.**).

- 2. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association (NE-CIHE)** - The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6). The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).
- 3. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NC-HLC)** - The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings (4.C.1.). The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs (4.C.2). The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data (4.C.3.). The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice (4.C.4.).
- 4. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NW-CCU)** - Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success (1.D.2).
- 5. The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS-COC)** - 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 (8.1).
- 6. Western Association for Senior Colleges (WASC-SR)** - The institution employs a deliberate set of quality-assurance processes in both academic and non-academic areas, including new curriculum and program approval processes, periodic program review, assessment of student learning, and other forms of ongoing evaluation. These processes include: collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data; tracking learning results over time; using comparative data from external sources; and improving structures, services, processes, curricula, pedagogy, and learning results (4.1).
- 7. Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association (WASC-ACCJC)** - The institution demonstrates a sustained, substantive and collegial dialog about student outcomes, student equity, academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement of student learning and achievement (I.B.1). The institution establishes institution-set standards for

student achievement, appropriate to its mission, assesses how well it is achieving them in pursuit of continuous improvement, and publishes this information (**I.B.3.**).

Colleges will need to extract and analyze data from their student information systems relating to retention, course completion rates, degree attainment, and best practices in data analysis. But the ICAT provides data on the college infrastructure for equitable student success such as leadership support, strategic planning, college resources, and policies and practices that support student success.

The ICAT can easily be a catalyst for ongoing, college-wide discussion about institutional strengths and areas for improvement, progress on systemic change, the adoption of best practices, and improvements in institutional quality. The subscale scores, item analysis, and broad-based discussion can serve as supplemental support documentation for activities, infrastructure, and support for student success work at the college.

### Case Making

Colleges are allowed to identify and explain their approach to the reaffirmation process. One accrediting commission states in its introduction to accreditation that “four principles guided the development of (their) standards: first, the mission-centric standards acknowledge the diversity of institutions; second, the focus of the standards is on the student learning experience; third, the standards emphasize institutional assessment and assessment of student learning; fourth, the standards support innovation as an essential part of continuous institutional improvement (MSA-CHE, 2013). Another acknowledges the difficulty of applying one set of standards to all types of institutions of higher education. The “evaluation of an institution’s educational quality and effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all its programs and services (SACS-COC 2018).

When the college writes the self-study or compliance document, identify the college’s relationship with Achieving the Dream, the commitment to capacity building across college programs and services, a justification for taking the ICAT and utilizing the results to improve programs and services. Reference the ICAT results throughout the self-study, explain the resulting conversations that occurred and how the college narrowed the focus to key strategies for improvement.

### Document Your Process to Support Accreditation

As with all aspect of the accreditation process, attention must be paid to planning and documentation of each step of the ICAT administration. While a college using the ICAT as part of its Achieving the Dream work will pull teams together, take the assessment, analyze their results, and use the information to help structure student success work, they will not necessarily conduct as rigorous a process as they would for use in their compliance certification or self-evaluation for accreditation. Achieving the Dream recommends that colleges do the following for using the ICAT:

- Document the steps in the process of planning, administering, and analyzing the results of the ICAT;
- Identify the strategies used in selecting key individuals or groups to take the assessment or be involved in the discussion of results during the Capacity Café;
- Take detailed notes during the Capacity Café, any follow-up meeting, planning and strategy sessions;
- Identify action items adopted as a result of the assessment in as much detail as possible;
- Delineate how the college moved from assessment and discussions to strategy to action;
- Identify a follow-up process or evaluation for each strategy or action item (close the loop);
- Include the college's accreditation liaison in the ICAT assessment process.

The ICAT can add meaningful supplemental support for virtually every area of accreditation. As long as colleges are careful to define and document their use of the tool, it can be used to guide their self-evaluation or compliance certification process.

### Alignment with Specific Accreditation Standards

The seven higher education commissions within the six regional accrediting agencies have developed self-regulating, peer evaluation processes with criteria and standards based on best practices in higher education. The accreditation process is designed to “provide an assessment of an institution’s self-defined mission; its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association; and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services” (SACS-COC, Principles of Accreditation, 2017). Accrediting agencies “expect affiliated institutions to work toward improving their quality, increasing their effectiveness, and continually striving toward excellence. Its evaluative processes are designed to encourage such improvement.” (NECHE, Standards for Accreditation, 2016)

The accrediting commissions periodically review and make changes to their standards; and as one makes changes in philosophy and practice, the others generally follow. Currently, all seven have similar constructs addressed through various sections of their criteria or standards. A detailed high-level crosswalk between ICAT sections and the standards for all seven regional commissions can be seen in Appendix A. Tables 1a – 1g contain broad alignment but specific examples of how colleges can use the ICAT in support of accreditation standards are below.

#### 1. Leadership and Vision

The **Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges of Western Association (WASC-ACCJC)** states that: Institutional leaders create and encourage innovation leading to institutional excellence. They support administrators, faculty, staff, and students, no matter what their official titles, in taking initiative for improving the practices, programs, and services in which they are involved. When ideas for improvement have policy or significant institution-wide implications, systematic participative processes are used to assure effective planning and implementation (IV.A.1). The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Does the president actively support efforts to improve student success?
- Are leaders willing to change structures, processes, and policies in support of student success?
- Are leaders willing to take data-informed risks to improve student outcomes and narrow equity gaps?
- Do leaders create a sense of urgency to improve student outcomes and narrow equity gaps?
- Do leaders celebrate early wins to sustain momentum for change?

Colleges will provide organizational charts, meeting notes, results of performance evaluations, and documented evidence of leadership in improving student success across various areas of the college. The college can also use the subscale score and the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Leadership and Vision portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff about the effectiveness of leadership in directing the student success agenda of the college.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies and actions to guide leadership decisions to improve student success.

## 2. Data and Technology

The ***Senior College and University Commission of the Western Association (WASC-SR)*** requires that: An institution collects and analyzes student data, disaggregated by appropriate demographic categories and areas of study. It tracks achievement, satisfaction, and the extent to which the campus climate supports student success. The institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students; assesses their preparation, needs, and experiences; and uses these data to improve student achievement (2.10). The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Does the institution set performance targets for improvement?
- Are qualitative data gathered to better understand student needs and motivations?
- Is student progress tracked within the first term and first year (using leading indicators) to inform timely interventions?
- Are data disaggregated by sub-groups of students to identify equity gaps and inform improvements?

The college can use the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Data and Technology portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff about whether the institution produces adequate data that are disaggregated across appropriate demographics to inform decisions and improve programs and services.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies to improve the accessibility and use of data and technology to help the college move toward achievement of its purpose.

## 3. Equity

The ***Commission on Colleges and Universities of the Northwest Association (NW-CCU)*** states: Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for

student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (1.D.2.). The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Does the institution have a formal entity or process in place to coordinate equity efforts?
- Are all members of the institution broadly engaged in conversations about equity to inform action?
- Does the institution have a defined set of measurable key performance indicators to track student progress, monitor equity gaps, and inform strategy development?
- Does the institution set performance targets for improvement?
- Are equity considerations embedded in college unit plans and practices?

The college can use the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Equity portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff about whether the institution is delivering teaching, learning and support services that support diversity and equity.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies to improve student success for all student populations regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability level. Colleges can show how these results led to strategies that improved student outcomes and reduced achievement gaps.

#### 4. Teaching and Learning

The ***Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association (SACS-COC)*** states that: The institution provides ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty members as teachers, scholars, and practitioners, consistent with the institutional mission. The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Does professional development meet the needs of faculty (full-time and adjunct) at various stages of their career?
- Do faculty demonstrate evidence-based, innovative, and reflective teaching practices as a result of professional development?
- Is teaching excellence integrated with college hiring, evaluation and promotion policies and practices?
- Do faculty apply research-based instructional practices that are aligned with the institution's success vision and goals?
- Does the institution develop and refine program learning outcomes to align with labor market demand and result in transferrable, applied skills for graduates?
- Are data regularly used to improve educational practice in the classroom?

The college can use the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Teaching and Learning portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of full- and part-faculty and staff about whether the institution is addressing the professional development needs of faculty and staff and whether training is being applied to practice.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies to improve the use of data to inform decision-making about classroom and student support services.

## 5. Engagement and Communication

The ***Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MS-CHE)*** states that: An accredited institution possesses institutional objectives, both institution-wide and for individual units, that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are used for planning and resource allocation (IV.1.);

An accredited institution demonstrates clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for constituent participation, and incorporate the use of assessment results (IV.2). The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Is communication planning an integral part of the institution's student success work (including identification of targeted messages, key stakeholders, communication channels, and timelines)?
- Are lessons learned from student success work communicated regularly and broadly across the institution?
- Are faculty, staff, and students engaged in the design of student success initiatives?
- Is student engagement encouraged and assessed so that strategies can be revised accordingly?

The college can use the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Engagement and Communication portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff about whether the institution is engaged in effective communication to faculty, staff and students.

## 6. Strategy and Planning

The ***Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association (NE-CIHE)*** states that: the institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.4). The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Is a climate of shared responsibility for student success created across all levels of the institution (i.e., all business, student services, and academic units)?
- Are initiative teams effectively organized and mobilized to bridge institutional silos, foster coordination/collaboration, and take action?
- Does the institution have a multi-year financial plan, based on data-informed assumptions, to support student success?

The college can use the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Strategy and Planning portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff to determine if the institution is meeting its priorities and responding to opportunities and challenges.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies to improve the use of data to inform decision-making in regard to student success challenges and the effectiveness of programs and services to address those challenges.

## 7. Policy and Practice

The ***Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NC-HLC)*** states that: Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission (5.A).

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

The ICAT allows faculty and staff to give the college a score on the following questions:

- Does the institution proactively review and identify policies and procedures that create barriers for students?
- Are formal processes in place to support development of new policies and procedures?
- Are internal and external stakeholders engaged in development and improvement of policies and procedures?
- Are processes in place to ensure effective implementation of new policies and procedures?

The college can use the subscale score and the frequency distribution of scores by item on the Policy and Practice portion of the ICAT to document the opinions of a broad range of faculty and staff to determine if policies and procedures are developed and reviewed in a collaborative and inclusive manor and help the college meet its mission.

The college can use the discussion guide to facilitate additional discussion about strategies to improve the development and implementation of appropriate policies and practices relating to student success.

Two detailed examples of the application of the ICAT can be found in the appendices. Appendix B is an example of aligning the equity capacity questions to the equity-related standards adopted by the seven accrediting commissions. Appendix C contains an example of using the ICAT to stimulate topics for the Quality Enhancement Plan required by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association.

## Conclusion

Accrediting commissions expect colleges and universities to align and integrate accreditation processes, criteria and standards with ongoing planning, evaluation, and improvement efforts.

Colleges look for methods of providing evidence to document the ongoing work at their institutions with their accreditation process. While assessment tools will probably never exist to provide valid and reliable measures of the undefined and unpredictable nature of student behavior, decision-making of faculty and staff, and improvements in institutional quality, the ICAT will provide documentation of the process to improve capacity across seven broad areas of the institution. Colleges can compare themselves relative to best practices on each item of the tool. If used appropriately, including good documentation, the process of administering the ICAT and analyzing the results can result in supplemental evidence of compliance with accreditation standards and criteria.

## References

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## Appendix A

### ALIGNING SECTIONS OF THE ICAT WITH ACCREDITATION MAJOR AREAS OF FOCUS

Table 1a: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Leadership and Vision							
Leadership and Vision	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
Last Update	2015	2016	2020	2020	2017	2014	2013
1a. Vision & Goals	I.1a, VII.1	1.1,3	1.B.1,2,3	1.A.1			
1b. Presidential Support	VII.3c.4ef	3.12			5.2	IV.B.1,2,3	
1c. Transformational Change	I.3	9.1	5.D	1.b.1		I.A.2,3, I.B.1	
1d. Support for Governing Body	I.3, VII.2d	1.4	5.B	2.A.2, 4		IV.A.1,5	
1e. Culture of Evidence	VII.5	1.5. 3.19		1.B.4	5.4, 7.3	I.B.4, 5 IV.A.7	4.3

Table 1b: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Data and Technology							
	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
2a. Defined Student Success Metrics	V.2abc, V.3abcfgh	8.1, 9.24	4.C.1,2, 4.A.6	1.B.2, 1.D.2	8.1, 2	I.B.3	1.2
2b. Data Collection & Analytics	V.3fgh	2.6, 8.3, 8.5, 8.6	4.C.3,4	1.D.4		I.B.5, 6	2.1, 4.1, 4.2
2c. Data Management	V.5	2.2					4.1, 4.2
2d. Data Dissemination & Application	V.2bc	2.8, 8.5, 8.6, 8, 9	5.D.2	1.D.3			4.2, 3, 4
2e. Information Technology	VI.689	7.21, 22, 26				III.C1,2	

**Table 1c: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Equity**

	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
3a. Leadership & Vision	I.1d, II.2a	1.C		1			
3b. Strategy & Planning	II.5			1.B.3			1.4
3c. Engagement & Communication		5.12, 8.6				II.A.7	
3d. Policies & Practices	II.9			2.G.1		III.A.12	
3e. Teaching & Learning	III.2e, IV.1	5.1, 5.2, 6.5, 6.16	3.B.4, 3.D.1,2	1.D.2, 1.D.3		II.C.3	

**Table 1d: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Engagement and Communication**

	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
4.a Internal Engagement & Communication	I.1b, VI.2	3.2, 9.5	5.C.3	1.B.4, 1.D.3	QEP	I.B.8, IV.A.6	
4b. External Engagement & Communication	I.1b, II.6, VII.2a	9.7,12, 17, 19	1.D.3		10.2	I.C.3	

**Table 1e: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Teaching and Learning**

	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
5a. Instructional Practices & Support Services	III.4, IV.1c, V	4.2, 5.7,10 6.15,16, 17	3.A,B,C, D.	2.G.4, 6	11.1, 12.1,2,	I.C.14, II.B.1,2,3	2.5,12,13
5b. Faculty Support	III.2d	4.7, 6.1					3.3
5.c Developmental Education Reform.	III.5b, IV.1b	5.4, 5.5, 5.6				II.A.4, II.C.7	
5d. Clear Pathways for Students	III.2a	4.3, 9.24					
5e. Culture of Evidence	II.8a, III.8, IV.6	2.7, 2.8, 4.6, 5.20	3.C.3, 4.A.1,2, 4.B	1.B.1, 1.C.5, 7	7.3, 8.2	II.A.2,3,16, II.C.1,2	2.3,4,6, 10

Table 1f: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Strategy and Planning							
	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
6a. Professional Development	V.3bc		3.C.4	2.F.2,	11.2, 6.5	II.C.5	
6b. Strategic Finance	VI.13a4	2.3, 2.4, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6	5.C.2,5	2.E.2	13.2.C	III.D.1,2,4	
6.c. Strategic Implementation	V.3cgh		5.C.2,5, 5.D.	1.B.4	QEP	I.B.9	4.6, 4.7
6d. Culture of Evidence	VI.9	2.6, 4.12, 7.10, 8.10	5.D	1.C.7, 2.F.4	7.3		

Table 1g: Accreditation Criteria/Standards Aligned to Policies and Practice							
	MS-CHE	NE-CIHE	NC-HLC	NW-CCU	SACS-COC	WASC - ACCJC	WASC - SR
	Standard	Standard	Criterion	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
7a. Policy Review, Development & Implementation	I.4	7.25	2.E	2.C.3,4	10.1,4,5	I.B.7	
7.b Culture of Evidence.	II.9	1.5				I.C.5	

## Appendix B ICAT Application Example

### Using the ICAT to Support Equitable Student Outcomes

An expectation of equitable outcomes for students has entered the language and standards of the accrediting commissions with each having one or more criteria or standard for colleges to address. Being open-door institutions, community colleges have stood for equality for decades. Colleges have been committed to giving all students an equal chance to obtain a college education and the potential to earn a living wage. But equity redirects the focus from “giving all students an equal chance to go to college” to “holistically supporting students in ways that give each student an equal chance of success in college.” Table 2 below lists one or more standards from each of the seven regional commissions that accredit colleges and universities relating to equity. The concerns raised in these standards are:

- Looking at disaggregated student success data based on subpopulations
- Determining if performance is equal or if achievement gaps exist across subpopulations (are some groups more successful than others)
- Implementing strategies to mitigate gaps
- Providing inclusive and equitable programs and services for diverse populations
- Having processes and practices to facilitate the success of all students regardless of background
- Providing a safe environment that fosters the success of all students
- Promoting student achievement and removing challenges and barriers to academic excellence and success

<b>Table 2: Accrediting Agency Standards and the College’s Commitment to Closing Equity Gaps</b>	
<b>Commission</b>	<b>Standard</b>
<b>The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association (ACCJC)</b>	<b>1.B.6.</b> The institution disaggregates and analyzes learning outcomes and achievement for subpopulations of students. When the institution identifies performance gaps, it implements strategies, which may include allocation or reallocation of human, fiscal and other resources, to mitigate those gaps and evaluates the efficacy of those strategies.
<b>Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association (SACS-COC)</b>	<b>8.1.</b> The institution identifies, evaluates, and publishes goals and outcomes for student achievement appropriate to the institution’s mission, <u>the nature of the students it serves</u> , and the kinds of programs offered. The institution uses multiple measures to document student success (data are to be dis-aggregated).
<b>Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (HLC)</b>	<b>1.C.</b> The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally-connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves. <b>2)</b> The institution’s processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations. <b>3)</b> The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.
<b>Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)</b>	<b>4.1</b> An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates clearly stated, ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with institutional mission.
<b>New England Commission on Higher Education (NWCHE)</b>	<b>5.</b> The institution addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students and provides a safe environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. It endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their educational program as specified in institutional publications.
<b>Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)</b>	<b>1.D.2</b> Such (success) indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).
<b>Western Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-SR)</b>	<b>2.10</b> The institution collects and analyzes student data, disaggregated by appropriate demographic categories and areas of study. It tracks achievement, satisfaction, and the extent to which the campus climate supports student success. The institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students; assesses their preparation, needs, and experiences; and uses these data to improve student achievement. The institution demonstrates that students make timely progress toward the completion of their degrees and that an acceptable proportion of students complete their degrees in a timely fashion, given the institution’s mission, the nature of the students it serves, and the kinds of programs it offers.

The mandate is clear that institutions of higher education must address equity across subpopulations of students, acknowledge gaps and take serious steps to reduce them. Data must be collected and disaggregated, analyzed and acted on. If gaps exist, strategies must be implemented to reduce barriers and close the gaps. This change in focus has taken some colleges by surprise and finding a method to evaluate their application of equitable standards to programs and services has been challenging.

### Sample College Experience – Telling Their Equity Story

To best use the ICAT, take the time to explain your college’s position on capacity building and how you plan to use the ICAT to frame your quality improvement processes. In the introduction to the self-study or compliance document, institutions produce an overview of their college, their programs, their students and community. Valley Technical College (the example) provided such information but added information about their work with Achieving the Dream and the administration of the ICAT.

*Valley Technical College (VTC) is a public, two-year college that provides quality education and promotes economic development in the counties it serves.*

*As an open-door institution of higher education, VTC serves traditional and nontraditional curriculum students with diverse backgrounds and a wide variety of educational goals. To help students meet their goals, VTC offers university transfer and applied science degrees, diplomas and short-term certificates. The curriculum includes programs in arts and sciences, business and computer technology, engineering technology, health sciences, hospitality, industrial science, and community service. VTC students draw on knowledge from a broad range of disciplines to develop the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are fundamental to career success and lifelong learning.*

*VTC further promotes economic and intellectual development through basic skills education (GED and adult basic ed), continuing education courses, customized education and training and a variety of employment training programs.*

*VTC joined Achieving the Dream in June 2015 and it is our goal to strengthen student success, reduce equity gaps and improve institutional quality. In order to do this, we are concentrating on building capacity across the college in the following areas: teaching and learning; equity; engagement and communication; strategy and planning; policies and practice; leadership and vision; and data and technology. Over the last five years, our affiliation with ATD has helped us become more transparent, data-informed, committed to equity and inclusion and more intentional about the design of the student experience. In collaboration with our ATD coaches, the Core, Data and strategy teams have worked on transformational change across the institution. The college took the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT\*) in September 2015 (n=354) and again in October 2019 (n=371). Each assessment was followed by a discussion-oriented World Café type event to determine strengths, weaknesses and ways to use the results to make improvements. The results of these assessments and resulting discussion will be referenced throughout this document.*

❖ *The ICAT is a nationally utilized, qualitative tool designed to stimulate discussion about the current state of the college relating to the seven above mentioned capacities.*

When Valley Technical College took the ICAT in fall 2015 and received the results, faculty, staff and the administration were surprised. Those who completed the survey rated the college on each question as having a minimal, moderate, strong or exemplary level of capacity. They also had the option of “I don’t know.”

Their first concern was the large numbers of faculty and staff who didn’t know what the college was doing in the following areas:

	<b><u>Percent Who Didn’t Know</u></b>
• Does the institution have a clear and compelling definition or statement of equity?	42%
• Are all members of the institution broadly engaged in conversations about equity to inform action?	37%
• Does the institution consider equity when proposing and evaluating policies and practices?	27%
• Do faculty engage in equitable practices in the classroom (like culturally relevant teaching, accessible resources, etc.)?	29%
• Does the institution offer professional development for faculty and staff to strengthen their work with diverse student populations and address equitable practices?	17%

- Are data disaggregated by sub-groups of students to identify equity gaps and inform improvements? 52%

Their second concern was low rating on most questions relating to this capacity among those who did know. Only 7-26% (varied by question) gave the college a strong or exemplary rating.

<b>Table 3: ICAT 1.5 Question Relating to Equity and Diversity</b>	<b>Strong or Exemplary Capacity</b>
Does the institution have a clear and compelling definition or statement of equity?	25%
Are all members of the institution broadly engaged in conversations about equity to inform action?	24%
Does the institution consider equity when proposing and evaluating policies and practices?	20%
Do faculty engage in equitable practices in the classroom (like culturally relevant teaching, accessible resources, etc.)?	26%
Does the institution offer professional development for faculty and staff to strengthen their work with diverse student populations and address equitable practices?	7%
Are data disaggregated by sub-groups of students to identify equity gaps and inform improvements?	18%

The college decided to form capacity teams which met regularly for approximately one year. The equity team came up with a set of strategies that they presented to senior leadership. The college took several actions.

1. With inclusive input, they developed a college equity statement that was widely distributed.
2. They adopted a set of early momentum metrics to determine if students were building or losing momentum during their first term and first year in college.
3. They disaggregated the data based on income level (Pell eligible or from high poverty zip codes), high school GPA, first generation status, race by gender, and enrollment status (full- or part-time). These data were widely distributed via a college webpage and included in college-wide newsletters and discussions.
4. Once they had the data and were able to determine which groups were facing the greatest challenges and barriers, they conducted focus groups with those students. They also conducted focus groups with some of their most successful students to determine their assets, what support services they had utilized and the challenges they had overcome.
5. They developed a two-hour, interactive professional development session (required for all faculty and staff) on equity at the college. This included information on definition of terms, the disaggregated data on student subpopulations, challenges and barriers faced by students, student assets that promoted success, focus group results and a discussion of potential strategies to successfully address student challenges.
6. From these sessions they developed strategy teams and implemented four strategies to assist students: 1) Student Navigators (success coaches) for all entering students. The Navigator curriculum allowed for individualized services based on student needs and challenges; 2) a strong first-year program including a required orientation (interactive and fun) and a student success courses focused on reducing challenges and barriers.

*“I don’t think we, as an institution, understand what equity is, let alone address it across all our areas of service delivery.”*  
**Faculty comment from World Café.**

They had dedicated sections of the course for key populations (e.g. single parents); 3) professional development on culturally responsive teaching resulting in changes in pedagogy and classroom supports for students (supplemental instruction or embedded tutors), and 4) a new individualized advising framework and onboarding process for new students.

7. They tracked student, advisor and faculty activity closely for three years. The strategy teams reviewed and acted on term data each semester. They made improvements to the programs as they went along.
8. In fall 2019, they retook the ICAT.

### Baseline Data on Momentum Metrics Disaggregated by Relevant Subpopulation

In the beginning, VTC disaggregated data across 15 subpopulations of students. After much discussion, further disaggregation and analysis, they selected five groups of students who were having the greatest challenges and needed direct and intentional services to meet their needs. Those groups are listed in tables 4a & b. After implementing the strategies listed above, the college compared fall 2019 data with the original fall 2015 data (baseline year).

Table 4a: Tech Data from Fall 2015						
1st Term Measures	All New	High Poverty	HS GPA <2.0	Latino Males	1st Gen	Part-time
GPA 2.0+ End of 1st Term	65%	45%	35%	60%	51%	60%
Zero College-level Credits End of 1st Term	13%	19%	19%	15%	15%	9%
Passed 75% Credits - 1st Term	68%	49%	32%	51%	46%	53%
Accumulated 9 Credits - 1st Term	54%	20%	12%	29%	24%	19%
2nd Term Measures	All New	High Poverty	HS GPA <2.0	Latino Males	1st Gen	Part-time
Returned in Spring Term	72%	68%	70%	69%	65%	75%
Passed 75% credits 2nd Term	70%	50%	28%	61%	52%	60%
Accumulated 18 Credits 1st Year	35%	17%	9%	31%	20%	19%
Completed Gateway English - 1st Year	62%	44%	40%	56%	52%	42%
Completed Gateway Math - 1st Year	41%	24%	12%	31%	26%	25%

They discovered that their strategies were not only improving success for all entering students, they were reducing equity gaps among their subpopulations of focus. They have made significant improvement but still have a long way to go to reach parity.

<b>1st Term Measures</b>	<b>All New</b>	<b>High Poverty</b>	<b>HS GPA &lt;2.0</b>	<b>Latino Males</b>	<b>1st Gen</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
<b>GPA 2.0+ End of 1st Term</b>	72%	46%	37%	65%	58%	65%
<b>Zero College-level Credits End of 1st Term</b>	11%	15%	15%	9%	12%	9%
<b>Passed 75% Credits - 1st Term</b>	72%	53%	35%	65%	51%	60%
<b>Accumulated 9 Credits - 1st Term</b>	56%	25%	19%	40%	35%	25%
<b>2nd Term Measures</b>	<b>All New</b>	<b>High Poverty</b>	<b>HS GPA &lt;2.0</b>	<b>Latino Males</b>	<b>1st Gen</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
<b>Returned in Spring Term</b>	80%	71%	72%	75%	69%	77%
<b>Passed 75% credits 2nd Term</b>	72%	54%	32%	65%	55%	65%
<b>Accumulated 18 Credits 1st Year</b>	51%	19%	14%	40%	35%	25%
<b>Completed Gateway English - 1st Year</b>	65%	51%	44%	59%	54%	49%
<b>Completed Gateway Math - 1st Year</b>	60%	30%	21%	45%	31%	50%

VTC retook the ICAT in fall 2019 but they do not have an accreditation visit until fall 2024. They will have time to retake the ICAT in 2023 if they choose and compare the results from 2015 and 2019. The results from 2019 can be seen in Table 5.

	<b>Didn't Know</b>		<b>Strong or Exemplary Capacity</b>	
	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>
Does the institution have a clear and compelling definition or statement of equity?	42%	3%	25%	53%
Are all members of the institution broadly engaged in conversations about equity to inform action?	37%	5%	24%	81%
Does the institution consider equity when proposing and evaluating policies and practices?	27%	2%	20%	49%
Do faculty engage in equitable practices in the classroom (like culturally relevant teaching, accessible resources, etc.)?	29%	10%	26%	52%
Does the institution offer professional development for faculty and staff to strengthen their work with diverse student populations and address equitable practices?	17%	0%	7%	87%
Are data disaggregated by sub-groups of students to identify equity gaps and inform improvements?	52%	12%	18%	91%

The college took quick action after the first administration of the ICAT and the strategies that developed with inclusive input succeeded in improving student success at the college and reducing equity gaps. Strategies and successes were widely communicated and faculty and staff ratings on the ICAT improved.

While this college might not include all the detail in the example above, a detailed synopsis of all that occurred will document their process of discovery, analysis and action relating to equitable treatment for all students.

## Appendix C: ICAT Application Example – Selecting a QEP

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires institutions to complete a compliance certification for core requirements and standards and a Quality Enhancement Plan. Their description of the QEP is as follows:

“The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the On-Site Reaffirmation Review Committee, is (1) a topic identified through ongoing, comprehensive and evaluation processes, (2) has a broad-based support of institutional constituencies, (3) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student successes, (4) commits resources to initiate, implement The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement and complete the QEP, and (5) includes a plan to assess achievement. The plan should be focused and succinct (no more than 75 pages of narrative text and no more than 25 pages of support documentation or charts, graphs, and tables).”

Extracted from:

<file:///C:/Users/terri/Documents/accred%20agencies/SACS%202018%20Principles%20Of%20A%20accreditation.pdf>

Rural Mountain Community College (RMCC) has an accreditation visit in three years. Prior to their site visit, they must submit a Quality Enhancement Plan. A cross-functional team was developed and given the charge of selecting a QEP topic according to the guidelines from their accrediting agency. The college doesn't have a lot of resources so they want the topic to be one of critical value to the college and local community.

The college is in a rural region with areas of extreme poverty bordering upper middle-class neighborhoods. The industries in the area are high growth biotech manufacturing companies alongside some long-running, low-technology mills. Over the last few years, the area has seen an influx of Latinx unskilled workers while the millwork simultaneously dried up causing high unemployment rates. Many of the students who returned to college had to obtain their GEDs or enroll in learning support classes first to prepare them for college-level courses. The college is in a state with a grant program for adults entering or re-entering higher education which covers tuition and fees. However, the large number of adult displaced workers that have entered the college have not been successful. Course withdrawal and drop-out rates are high and course success rates are low (Freshman Comp 37% A-C grades, College Algebra 28% A-C grades). These students wanted to retool and prepare for better employment but had difficulty completing courses and staying in college. These students now feel hopeless and their prospects for future employment remain low.

Just before the QEP team began their work to develop a topic, the institution decided to take the ICAT. The senior leadership made a concerted effort to get every faculty and staff to participate and 95% responded to the survey. During opening convocation in fall 2018, the college held the discussion-oriented Capacity Café for the entire college. Once the events were completed, the team pulled together the survey results and the discussion notes from each capacity area to study the “big picture.” Some themes emerged that warranted further analysis.

- Leadership was rated high in regard to commitment to student success.
  - Willingness to take risks to improve student outcomes and narrow equity gaps.

- Willingness to change structures, processes, and policies in support of student success.
- Creating a climate of shared responsibility for student success across the institution.
- Having access to the data needed to inform student success efforts was rated low.
  - Having defined key performance indicators to track student progress.
  - Having disaggregated data by sub-groups of students to identify equity gaps.
  - Tracking the progress of student success initiatives/interventions.
- Faculty/staff development in light of the changing student demographic was rated low.
  - Professional development to strengthen work with diverse student populations.
  - Professional development meeting the needs of faculty (full-time and adjunct).
- The college's ability to meet the needs of its current students was rated low
  - Instruction takes into consideration different ways students learn based on varied cultural values and back grounds.
  - The institution addressing basic student needs that might affect their attendance, class participation, and overall institution engagement.
  - The institution working towards integration of academic and non-academic supports for students.

These data gave the team some actionable information. They did the following:

1. Asked institutional research to give them course success, retention, credential completion and time to completion data disaggregated by employment status, age, gender, race, ESL status and Accuplacer score.
2. Once they reviewed these data, they developed a survey with input from a group of faculty and front-line student services staff. The survey asked students for more detailed demographic information (income, family status, dependent care, hours worked, educational background, technology usage, etc.) and challenges and barriers in attending the college.
3. They conducted focus groups with full-time and part-time faculty and frontline student services staff about their comfort level and ability in working with displaced workers and diverse student populations. They asked about challenges and barriers students had, possible services that needed to be delivered and professional development that needed to be developed.

Many of the faculty and staff felt overwhelmed with the needs of their students and college services seemed to be inadequate for the current student population. Students had issues with childcare, technology usage, meeting basic needs, time commitment and language issues. Students felt it took too long to complete degrees (especially those with low literacy levels) when they needed to find work now.

The college used their ICAT results as a launching point to dig deeper into issues impacting students. That, along with data from their student system, surveys and focus groups gave them the direction they needed to create the parameters for their QEP topic. While they discovered

many issues worth addressing, their QEP needed to be focused and measurable. They determined their four greatest issues were:

- Reading and language skills were impacting large numbers of first year students;
- Basic needs (food, clothing, technology access and transportation) were impacting student focus and commitment;
- The college needed stackable certificates leading to a degree allowing students to go to work after they earn the first certificate;
- The college needed bilingual student services staff and expanded hours in the evening;

There were many needs that arose with multiple strategies to address each one. Because the QEP topic needs to be focused, feasible and have a direct impact on student learning and/or success, the team selected “Language for Life” for their QEP title. The program focused on improving the following student learning outcomes and/or student successes:

1. Increasing completion rates in general education courses for first year students;
2. Improving English language skills for challenged English language learners;
3. Increasing credit accumulation in the first term and first year;
4. Increasing credential completion rates;
5. Improving employment rates in high demand, high wage jobs.

With the addition of QEP strategy teams and additional input, they created a recruitment and first year program for displaced workers and challenged English language learners. A series of professional development trainings were developed and delivered for faculty and staff before they rolled out the program.

Program elements were:

- A summer language bootcamp for all entering students who either need ESL or reading support;
- Reading Apprenticeship training for all faculty in all disciplines (train one trainer);
- Reading support for faculty and suggested language-oriented activities for classrooms;
- One new bilingual academic advisor;
- Two 1-credit hour student success courses (one each of first two terms) focused on reducing barriers and increasing engagement (formerly a 2-credit hour, 1<sup>st</sup> term course);

Qualitative and quantitative assessment tools and metrics were developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the QEP. Those included:

- Assessments for improved language skills;
- Early momentum metrics such as completion of college-level English in the first year, credit accumulation in the first term and reduced drops and withdrawals;
- Use of ESL services;
- Sessions with bilingual counselor/advisor;
- Better engagement in college activities;
- Increased credential completion rates.

The college will want to expand on the information included in the example above since they have a 75-page limit for the QEP with a requirement that it be a topic identified through ongoing, comprehensive and evaluation processes and has a broad-based support of institutional



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constituencies. The steps they took in the process needs to be carefully documented and recorded.