

An Approach to Demonstrating Achievement of ACCE Student Learning Outcomes

Tom M. Leathem, CPC
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS

In February 2014 the American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) approved a measure to move from a prescription-based accreditation model to an outcomes-based model. The new model requires programs seeking ACCE accreditation to demonstrate level of student achievement in the identified student learning outcomes (SLO's). This is drastically different from the previous model in which programs were required to identify meeting minimum contact hours in specified content areas. This research is intended to focus on two identified concerns with the new accreditation model. First, the adopted SLO's are purposefully ambiguous so as to allow each program the ability to tailor each SLO to fit their programs curricular aim. For example SLO 1 states "Create written communications appropriate to the construction discipline." Tangible elements of this outcome can be interpreted in many different forms. Second, demonstrating achievement of each student learning outcome requires understanding what "achievement" actually means. These two concerns have been voiced in recent ACCE meetings by attendees representing many different institutions. As such, ACCE has put out a call for examples of how to demonstrate achievement of SLO's to help clarify these concerns. The objective of this research is to propose a methodology for addressing the new outcomes standard implemented by ACCE that other programs may be able to use in their endeavor toward ACCE accreditation. Specifically, the research will address an approach to clarifying each SLO to fit the programs objectives, developing assessment strategies, and mapping the strategy to the quality improvement plan. The overall research intends to utilize a mixed-methods approach to clarify the tangibles of each SLO and identify assessment strategies. This includes review of literature, and qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Research previously conducted to arrive at the new ACCE standard is reviewed to develop further understanding of the student learning outcomes and provide basis for further development at the program level. A Delphi study at the program and regional level involving sample feedback from faculty and industry is intended to establish SLOs at the program level. Development of the assessment methods to demonstrate outcomes will focus on strategies used in other outcomes-based disciplines. Preliminarily, the intended results of the research is the establishment, at the program level, for a model of clarified student learning outcomes, how they map across the program curriculum, and a proposed method of assessment. Once established, the intended final result is to evaluate the model beyond the program level in comparison with other universities with the intent of analyzing the proposed model effectiveness with other methodologies. Ideally, the research will provide other construction programs example defined tangible attributes for each SLO through a nationally based consensus strategy. Demonstrating a programs impact based on outcomes of student learning is new to many construction programs. The research conducted will help provide a methodology for programs seeking accreditation under the new ACCE requirements. Dissemination of the research will provide others with an example methodology for defining the student learning outcomes for their program. In addition, the research will provide clarity of assessment strategies, and considerations for adoption of such specific to outcomes-based construction education.

Key Words: ACCE, Learning, Outcomes, Assessment, student achievement