

FAQ About State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts

1. Who mandated academic learning compacts and who will enforce them?

The state Board of Governors mandated academic learning compacts be identified and used within each bachelors' degree offered by each university in the SUS.

The compacts are part of the accountability system being developed by the Board of Governors. The system will contain information on several aspects of university performance and be available on the Board web page. Universities will submit information for inclusion in the accountability system, according to Board guidelines, annually.

The Board allows each university to define its own policies in the implementation of the compacts. Universities are expected to oversee their own policies. The university will use its existing institutional effectiveness approval process to review and approve the compacts. The Board has not indicated how it will enforce compliance with university or state policy, although its authority in this area is broad.

2. What exactly is being required of the faculty, students and university?

The state wants universities to certify that each Baccalaureate graduate has completed a program with clearly stated core learning expectations in critical thinking, communication, and discipline and content knowledge and skills. The faculty is supposed to identify the expected core learning outcomes that will be attained by graduates of each baccalaureate program. These outcomes must then be communicated to students. In order to ensure graduates have met the expectations of each compact, each program is expected to develop and deploy assessment mechanisms that determine how well student learning matches stated expectations. The assessments of student performance must be corroborated through evaluation methods that are periodically reviewed to validate the accuracy of the assessment methods. These assessment methods will also be reviewed in the required state seven year program review. The results of the assessments are to be used to improve student performance and program effectiveness. The university must report annually on the results of the academic learning compacts.

3. Why do we have a “policy” separate from the “guidelines”?

A separate “policy” and set of “guidelines” provide the faculty and administration more flexibility in responding to the state mandate than would a single policy. Each university Board of Trustees must approve policies governing the state mandated academic learning compacts. These policies are also subject to review by the Board of Governors for consistency with state guidelines. University guidelines can be approved by the Faculty Senate and Administration with reference to either the Board of Trustees or Board of Governors.

A prospective policy change would require review and approval at two levels outside the typical administrative process on campus. As a consequence, a single policy document would be difficult to change, lock the faculty and administration into decisions for longer periods, and be subject to more state oversight than two separate documents.

4. How will the compacts affect my work in the classroom?

The compacts require agreement by faculty within a program about what the outcomes of the program are to be and how progress in attaining these results is to be measured and assessed. For most programs, this will mean little change in classroom activities since curriculum committees typically have this role. However, it will require faculty to document and report results on specific assessments, as decided within each program.

5. How will the compacts affect degree programs?

Compacts should not affect most degree programs. Programs that have course requirements that can be associated with learning outcomes can comply without difficulty. Programs where course requirements do not allow easy association will have to construct means to ensure that every graduate has completed a program that has those core learning outcomes. This can be done through methods such as a required examination, a capstone experience, specific requirements such as portfolios or essays, or structured sampling.

6. Will my department have the opportunity to revise the outcomes it measures?

Yes, annually in the fall.

7. What does validation of the assessment measures mean?

Both the state officials and those at SACS expect that the measures used to assess student performance will be valid. Measurement validity, it must be recognized, is a topic on which there are a number of competing perspectives, none of which are likely to be satisfied with the contours of the current situation.

Generally, a valid measure is one that accurately captures the student's performance on the outcome. Even this view is a simplification, however. For the purposes of the current implementation, SACS requires that the assessments not be the product of a single instructor – it hopes to produce intersubjective validity by making the measurement the product of a group of faculty or some independent group. The state wants universities to establish the validity of the measurements they use by corroborating student performance on the measurements with other indicators of student performance. Here the aim appears to be reaching some form of predictive, concurrent or convergent validity involving correlations with items such as test scores, grades, national exams and the like. In addition, they want external reviewers to review the measures during the

required seven year program review. Ostensibly, the reviewer would provide some assurance of content validity.

8. Will faculty, programs, departments, colleges or the university have to keep records on individual students majoring in our department?

There is no requirement that faculty, programs, department, colleges or the university will have to keep records on the individual outcomes for individual students majoring in each department. The assessments, by policy and guidelines, are tied to requirements for graduation. The satisfaction of graduation requirements is certified by the program to the registrar, who maintains the associated course records. If the satisfaction of graduation requirements occurs outside required courses, then the satisfaction of such requirements will have to be communicated to the Registrar as is now the case. Summary records about performance on the outcomes will be maintained in the institutional effectiveness portal.

9. Will program assessments be subject to audit, and if so, by whom?

State officials have not indicated whether they will audit program assessments. University Boards of Trustees must certify the university is in compliance and that graduates have completed Baccalaureate programs with state mandated academic learning compacts. Program assessments will be reviewed within the program, by the college and by the Office of Provost and Academic Affairs. They may also be considered by the Undergraduate Policy committee or other committees of the Faculty Senate.

10. What are the annual deadlines for submission?

The deadline for submission of Student Learning Outcomes for the academic year, along with your assessment methods for each outcome, is September 15th.

The deadline for submission of your results and analysis of assessments conducted during the previous academic year along with your action plans is October 15th.

Entries can be submitted into the institutional effectiveness portal from August 15th to October 15th, annually. These deadlines follow our policy of using the current institutional effectiveness system to satisfy the State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts requirements.

Please remember that the current year is unusual. Due to deadlines imposed by SACS, Student Learning Outcomes and associated assessments for 2005-2006 were submitted in the summer. You can expect to be contacted about these submissions once the Faculty Senate has taken action on the university policy and guidelines regarding State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts (SMALCs). This year, you will be asked to review your submissions for consistency with the policy and guidelines adopted by the Senate.

11. How will the State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts be disseminated to students?

The State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts for each Bachelor's degree program will be made readily available to students electronically at a site yet to be determined. The web site will provide current and prospective students access to the requirements of the State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts.

The information posted on the web site will include your outcome statements and a list of the types of assessment you will use. Before any information on a major is posted for general distribution, representatives from each program will be given an opportunity to review the material.

12. When will these requirements take effect?

The requirements take effect the beginning of the semester following the dissemination of information on our State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts. Since we will have our web site up and running prior to the end of this calendar year, they will take effect beginning with the Spring 2006 semester.