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Institutional Effectiveness: A New Hurdle for Collegiate Aviation

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Editorial

**INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:
A NEW HURDLE FOR COLLEGIATE AVIATION**

What skills, attributes, knowledge, and values does a well educated college graduate possess? Does a college education make a difference or could an individual prepare just as well for the workplace in another manner? These questions have become more important in the past few years as outcomes assessment or institutional effectiveness issues have been included in the process of regional accreditation (or reaffirmation of accreditation) of colleges and universities.

The question "does a college education make a difference" seems to be on everyone's mind, particularly the accreditation association's. Regional accreditation associations are not only increasingly interested in assessment procedures and their administration, but are also placing a great deal of emphasis on the use of assessment findings for program evaluation.

Traditionally, collegiate aviation programs have blended a highly technical/vocational, practical learning experience into an acceptable academic major. Many collegiate academic programs are designed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and are for the specific purpose of meeting performance objectives contained in the appropriate Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs). However, colleges and universities in the Southern U.S. will have to face new challenges, particularly with respect to institutional effectiveness, when they prepare for visits by representatives of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The issue of institutional effectiveness is an extremely important one to SACS, and is so critical to the accreditation process that a *Manual on Institutional Effectiveness (1989)* was developed by the association to assist colleges and universities in

interpreting Section III of the *Criteria for Accreditation*. Although James T. Rogers, of SACS, states that the "inclusion of the section on 'Institutional Effectiveness' is a very modest first step" (p. ii), this document provides institutions with a comprehensive, thought-provoking treatise on how to effectively interpret the five "must" statements concerning their teaching effectiveness. These five statements indicate that, to be accredited or reaccredited, an institution must:

1. establish adequate procedures for planning and evaluation
2. define [the institution's] expected educational results
3. describe how the achievement of these results will be ascertained
4. engage in continuing study, analysis and appraisal of their purposes, policies, procedures, and programs
5. evaluate the institutional research function

In addition, there are eight "should" statements that can be considered advisory and not prescriptive in nature. Included among these are suggestions relating to the planning and evaluation process that may be employed in addressing the issue of effectiveness.

How does this affect collegiate aviation programs? In a big way. Because the parent institution is being evaluated, so are the flight line, the aerospace classroom, and the repair station. Aviation programs will have to justify their academic existence in new and challenging ways.

How to prepare and proceed? One approach is to become heavily involved from the beginning with your institution's effectiveness efforts. An additional variable to be considered is that there may be a number of major programs within your institution that are approved by the FAA. Such programs might be the FAR 141 flight instruction curriculum, an aviation maintenance technician school certificate issued under FAR 147, or a certified repair station with associated ratings. While most of these certificates specify (a) the manner in which certificates are issued and maintained, (b) what facilities and equipment are required as part of the instructional program, (c) the minimum experience levels and certification of instructional personnel, (d) the curriculum, and (e) the minimum measurable performance level for each flight, ground, or repair operation, such a level of performance may not be, in and of itself, totally acceptable for accreditation. Just

meeting FARs or complying with the Practical Test Standards may not suffice; you may have to re-evaluate your entire academic program.

If full reevaluation is required, one fundamental activity that may be helpful is writing performance objectives for all courses, instructional sequences, and the academic program that is part of the aviation program. A hands-on, user-friendly, step-by-step method of developing performance objectives using

action verbs, criteria, and conditions may be an appropriate direction when offering assistance to faculty members who may need help. Additionally, this may also be the proper time to review each academic offering, prepare uniform course syllabi, and do a general housecleaning in the paperwork department.

Many problems associated with the development of assessment procedures to meet the accreditation criteria may seem

almost insurmountable in the beginning, but these challenges are not impossible. Faculty will soon begin talking about "outcomes assessment," seeing ways to improve teaching to provide students with a more meaningful educational experience, and ways to better prepare graduates for the demands of the workplace. Isn't that what we really want to do anyway!

HRL



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