

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY ACCREDITATION UPDATES

January 2009 Newsletter

The Science of Accreditation

I was intrigued as I recently attended Jeff Eaton's Hinckley Lecture as he steered an undeviating course into an evidenced-based approach to understanding the ecosystem in which we play a part. As I listened, I was reminded of the years I spent as a practicing attorney, in a world also dominated by determinations of evidence-based legal "facts."

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Our primary accreditation task, then, is to identify what we want our students to learn and then to document that learning. Typically, our problem is not with the character of the evidence that we are gathering, but with the process that we use for maintaining that evidence so that it can be used to document the outcomes that we are achieving.

Need more
information on
accreditation?
or
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**"In many ways,
the accreditation process,
like science
and law is 'evidence driven.'"**

For example, either a graded research paper or graded clinical notes related to an assignment that is driven by a course's learning outcomes can be excellent primary evidence of learning, provided that it is maintained in a way that the evidence can be shared. Sometimes, a statistical analysis of sampled data adds information that increases the value of the evidence. Often it does not. The simple keys for each of us to improve our evidence gathering are threefold:

In many ways, the accreditation process, like science and law is "evidence driven." However, unlike the law or science where there are standardized evidentiary elements, higher education accreditation focuses on evidence of institutionally-defined outcomes. Essentially, the process looks for evidence that the institution is doing what it says it is doing.



1. Ensure that the teaching and methods of assessment are in concert with stated learning goals.
2. Gather and grade representative outcomes either as summary data or as representative samples.
3. Maintain the data so that the "evidence" can be shared.