

## CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE IN ASSOCIATE IN APPLIED SCIENCE DEGREES

This October, at its fall conference in Seattle, NCOE published a new monograph, *Criteria for Excellence in Associate of Applied Science Programs*, a significant revision of the original *Criteria*, first published in 1985. The new document, developed over two years by a task force established in 1997 and co-chaired by Board members Lynn Tolle Burger and Bob Mundhenk, takes into account developments in occupational education over the last fourteen years as well as projections for the future. Almost every element of the original statement has changed, the number of criteria has increased, and there is significant emphasis on such things as assessment, integration of curricula, and community involvement.

There are twenty criteria in the new document:

1. **Degree designation.** A.A.S. degrees serve a more immediately employment-related function than do the transfer degrees offered at community colleges.
2. **Specialty Designation.** Each Associate in Applied Science degree program should have a specialty designation that clearly and specifically aligns with the occupation for which program-completing students will be qualified.
3. **Alignment with Core Community Needs and Standards.** Specialty designations must be based on clearly defined and assessable skill sets, reflective of community needs and expectations, but also in accord with national skill standards where appropriate.
4. **Program Planning.** The institution of any A.A.S. programs be based on documented community or regional needs, and should contain specialty and non-specialty skill sets.
5. **Program Size.** With few exceptions, Associate in Applied Science degrees should be no fewer than 60 and no more than 72 semester hours, or 90 to 108 quarter hours, long.
6. **Flexibility of Offerings.** Program planning should show evidence of taking into account flexible approaches to learning, such as credit for experience, distance learning, work-based learning, modular degree components, and alternative scheduling.
7. **General Curriculum Design.** AAS programs should be designed to provide students not only with immediately useful, specific employment skills but also with more general workplace competencies, as well as with broad-based competencies that prepare students for life-long learning.
8. **Program Integrity.** Curricular elements should be integrated and general skills reinforced within technical courses.

9. **Distribution of Essential Curricular Elements.** Between one half and two-thirds of a student's program should be devoted to the development of specialty skills and related technical skills sets; between one third and one half be devoted to general education.
10. **Outcomes Orientation.** Every educational experience a student undergoes should produce or relate to a measurable outcome relevant to the program's overall educational goals. Program design should include clear assessment methods and schedules.
11. **Employers and Service Area.** Every A.A.S. program should have clearly documentable community involvement.
12. **Articulation Efforts.** Whenever possible, A.A.S. degree programs should be articulated with both secondary and post-secondary programs.
13. **Coordination of Programs.** Program should be designed so that A.A.S. degrees are portable from county to county, state to state, so that curriculum is not a barrier to a student's career flexibility.
14. **Admissions Requirements.** Although most community colleges are open admissions institutions, not all A.A.S. programs can or should be open admissions programs. Program admission numbers should be correlated to the availability of jobs for graduates by means of data on employment, attrition, and retention trends.
15. **Student Services.** Institutions that offer A.A.S. degrees should have appropriate services available for the particular needs of A.A.S. students, and all services available to non-A.A.S. students should also be available to A.A.S. students.
16. **Faculty Qualification.** Faculty must be qualified both pedagogically and technically teach in A.A.S. programs.
17. **Faculty Development.** Faculty should be expected to maintain their currency in both their technical fields and in pedagogy, so they must show evidence of ongoing professional development. Institutions must both demand and support such development.
18. **Academic Governance.** Faculty should participate as fully as possible in all program planning, assessment, and modification.
19. **Outcome Assessment.** Each A.A.S. program within an institution should conduct ongoing assessment of the achievement of these outcomes at the skill set, course, and program levels.
20. **Accountability.** Institutions should have in place regular reporting systems for employers, the community, the college community and relevant funding or governmental agencies.