

Quality Assurance Funding

Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) incentivizes high-quality performance and provides a means of assessing the progress of student learning at public community colleges and universities. Tennessee was the pioneer in developing quality-based funding for higher education institutions and has become a model for states seeking to promote the highest standards and continuous improvement.



QAF standards are evaluated every five years to ensure alignment with state higher education priorities. The 2015-20 QAF cycle standards reflect current state priorities outlined in the 2015-25 Master Plan, guided by the Drive to 55, and continue to challenge institutions to promote the highest standards while carrying out their unique missions.

2015-20 QAF Defining Features

Academic Programs

When an appropriate accrediting agency is not available, institutions utilize program evaluations to ensure that academic program standards remain high through a self-study and external review. As part of the 2015-20 cycle standards review, program evaluation rubrics have been updated to reflect current best practices and align with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) standards.

Institutional Satisfaction Study

In the 2015-20 QAF cycle, community colleges and universities will follow a unique schedule to engage various institutional stakeholders. Colleges and universities will use widely-respected surveys, employed at institutions across the country, to determine institutional satisfaction at the campuses.

Adult Learner Success

A major component of the 2015-25 Master Plan and Tennessee Reconnect is engaging adult learners. To support institutions in this critical mission, QAF implemented the Adult Learner Success standard focused on the unique experiences and challenges facing adult students. In 2015-16, institutions performed a self-study and gathered feedback from adult students that will help to create a campus-specific action plan for engaging adult learners. The standard also examined adult student graduation rates as compared to the institution's prior three-year average.

Tennessee Job Market Graduate Placement

The community college job placement standard utilizes data from the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS) which combines data from the Tennessee Department of Education, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and THEC. TLDS allows THEC to complete a statewide job placement analysis that is uniform across all community colleges, rather than through the use of surveys.

Student Access and Success

QAF focuses institutional attention on increasing the access and success of focus populations around the state. All institutions selected five populations on which to focus particular attention and resources throughout the 2015-20 QAF cycle. Low-income students and underrepresented race and ethnicity are the most common focus populations selected by colleges and universities, and eight institutions chose to concentrate on veterans.

QAF and the Funding Formula

How do they work together? How are they different?

QAF works hand-in-hand with the outcomes-based funding formula, with QAF complimenting the funding formula by providing an incentive for growth in outcomes to pair with a focus on quality. While state appropriations to each institution are largely determined through the funding formula, QAF provides an incentive for institutions to focus on outcomes as well as quality. QAF emphasizes quality of programs and success beyond graduation, ensuring that student outcomes are aligned with the state's higher education goals.

For more information on QAF, including a breakdown of the average point recommendations, contact Victoria Harpool at victoria.harpool@tn.gov.