

# Insufficient Evidence: Strategies for Avoiding This Perilous Finding

Florida Association for Institutional Research

February 7-9, 2007

Cocoa Beach, Florida

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# Learning Outcomes

Participants will be able to:

- Identify common reasons for findings of non-compliance
- Discuss components of a sound argument
- Systematically formulate a sound argument

# Accountability and Institutional Effectiveness

- Regional, professional, and discipline-specific accrediting agencies
- Boards of education
- Legislators
- Funding agencies
- The public

# Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

- Compliance Certification  
(100+ core requirements and  
comprehensive standards)
- Quality Enhancement Plan

# Adequacy of Argument and Sufficiency of Evidence

- Off-Site Review Committees
- On-Site Review Committees
- Compliance and Reports Committees

***The burden is on the institution  
“to make the case.”***

# COC Peer Review Research Project

Analysis of compliance decisions made by Off-Site and On-Site Review Committees during 2005-2006:

- Off-Site: At least 50% of institutions were not compliant with six standards
- On-Site: Many institutions became compliant with same six standards during intervening 5-6 months

## COC Peer Review Research Project

		<b>% Institutions Non-Compliant</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Off-Site (n=156) 2005/2006</b>	<b>On-Site (n=75) 2006</b>
3.7.1	Faculty qualifications	88%	36%
3.3.1	Institutional effectiveness	62%	27%
3.5.1	General education competencies	61%	42%
3.4.1	Programs approved by faculty/learning outcomes	58%	32%
2.11	Resources	55%	5%
3.2.1	Evaluation of administrators	50%	5%

# Reasons for Non-Compliance

- Timing (audit)
- Requirement difficult for off-site review
- Institution failed to make the case  
– often “insufficient evidence” was presented to support assertions of compliance

# Non-Compliance with 3.3.1

## (Institutional Effectiveness)

- General lack of clarity
- Mislabeled documents
- Limited use of assessment results
- Poor linkages between program goals, assessment activities, assessment results, and program changes

# Why Focus on Developing Sound Arguments?

- Data do not speak for themselves.
- Not everything that can be counted counts.
- Providing review committees with evidence alone is not sufficient.
- There must be a compelling case that X is in place.

(Carter & Johnson, 2006)

# Strategy for Presenting a Sound Argument

- Traditional research model  
Hypothesis — Data — Conclusion
- Argumentation model  
Preliminary Claim — Data —  
Final Claim for Report

# Preliminary Claim Must Be Examined

- Ask, *What do I have to go on?*
- Then ask, *How did I get there?*

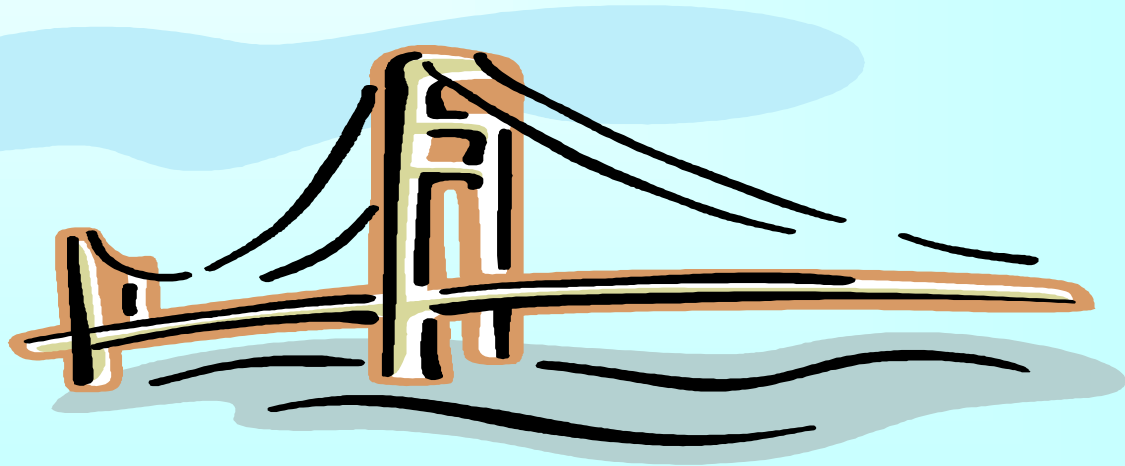
(Toulmin, 2003)

# ARGUMENT

**E  
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D  
E  
N  
C  
E**

**Warrant**

**C  
L  
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# Framework of an Argument

- Clearly state the preliminary claim (dependent variable)
- Identify possible causes (independent variables)
  - Eliminate some in light of data
  - Identify presumptions
  - Identify most plausible cause

# Field-Dependent Features

- Interrelationship of sentences within a framework that leads to a conclusion
- Standards and criteria appropriate to the field
- Strength of the case

# Tools of Argumentation

- Definition (genus, division)
- Comparison (similarity, difference, degree)
- Relationship (cause/effect, antecedent/consequence, contraries, contradictions)

(Bridges & Rickenbacker, 1993)

# Tools of Argumentation

- Circumstance (possible, impossible, beginning, conclusion, past fact, future fact)
- Testimony (authority, testimonials, statistics, maxims, law, precedent)

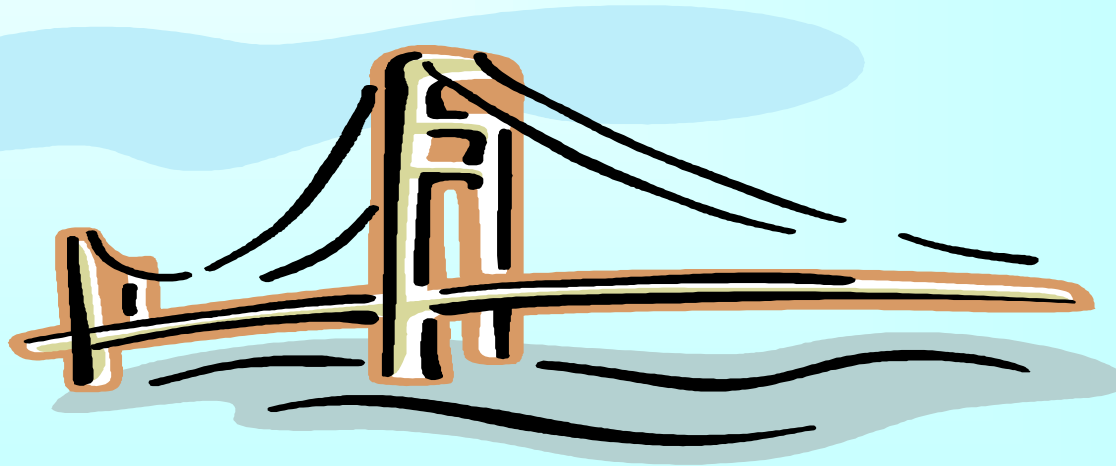
(Bridges & Rickenbacker, 1993)

# ARGUMENT

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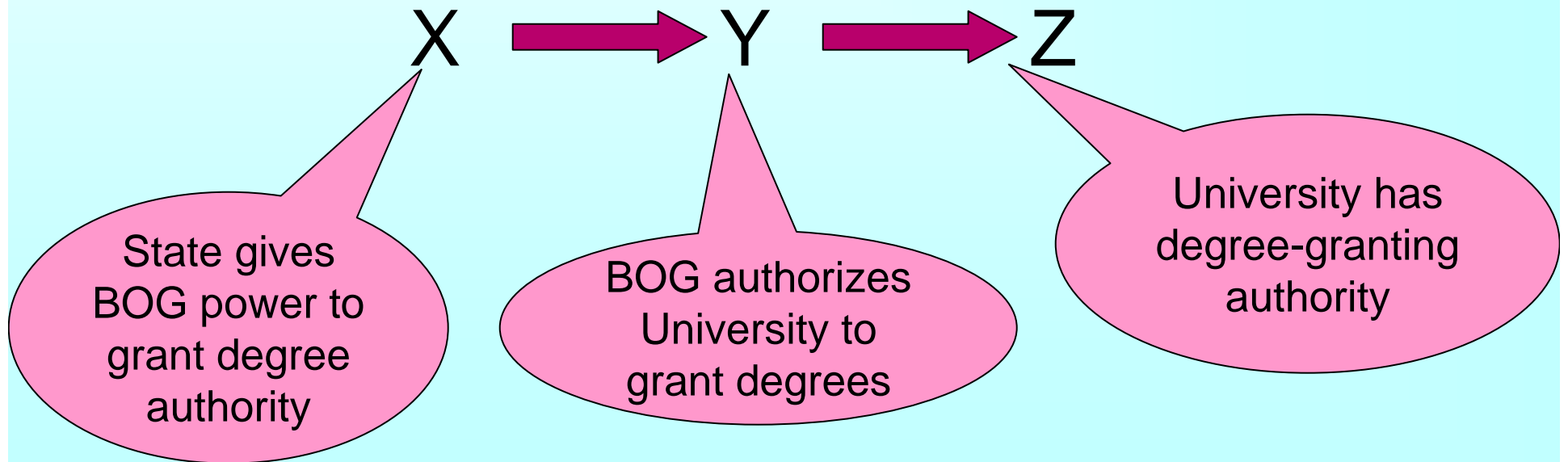
**Warrant**

**C  
L  
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# Core Requirement 2.1: Degree-granting Authority

Where X and Y are evidence (independent variables), and Z is the claim (dependent variable)



## Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1:

### General Education Core Competencies

For complicated cases, you may be trying to establish more than one claim.

Here,  $Z_1$  and  $Z_2$  are related claims (dependent variables), but they must be "made" separately.

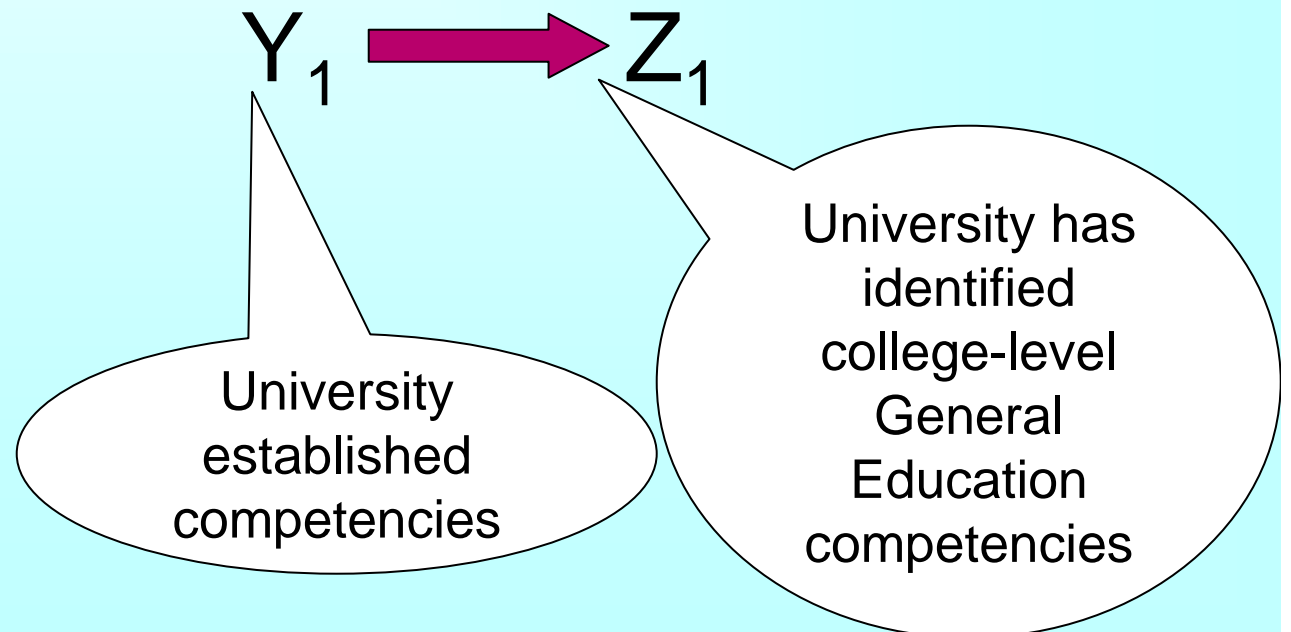
Identify college level Gen Ed competencies

$Z_1$

$Z_2$

Provide evidence that graduates have attained these competencies

Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1:  
General Education Core Competencies (PART 1)  
Where  $Y_1$  is evidence  
(independent variable);  
 $Z_1$  is the first part of the claim  
(dependent variable)



Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1:  
General Education Core Competencies (PART 2)

Where  $Y_2$  is evidence  
(independent variable);  
 $Z_2$  is the final part of the claim  
(dependent variable)



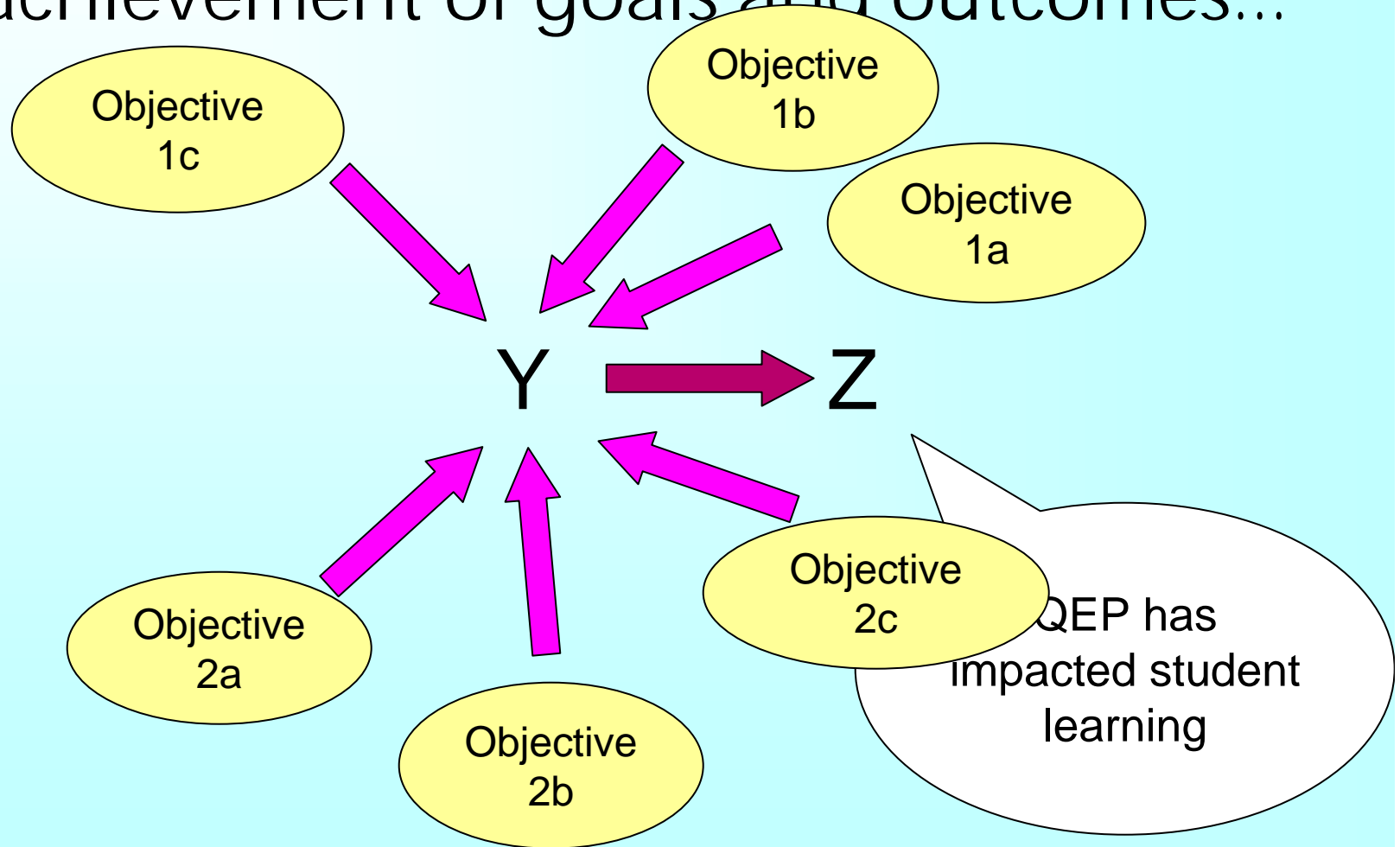
Assessment is used for continuous improvement

Assessment administered in combination of lower and upper level

Graduates have attained General Education competencies

# Quality Enhancement Plan: IMPACT REPORT

...direct impact on student learning including the achievement of goals and outcomes...



## ***QEP Goal 1: Develop an ecological perspective.***

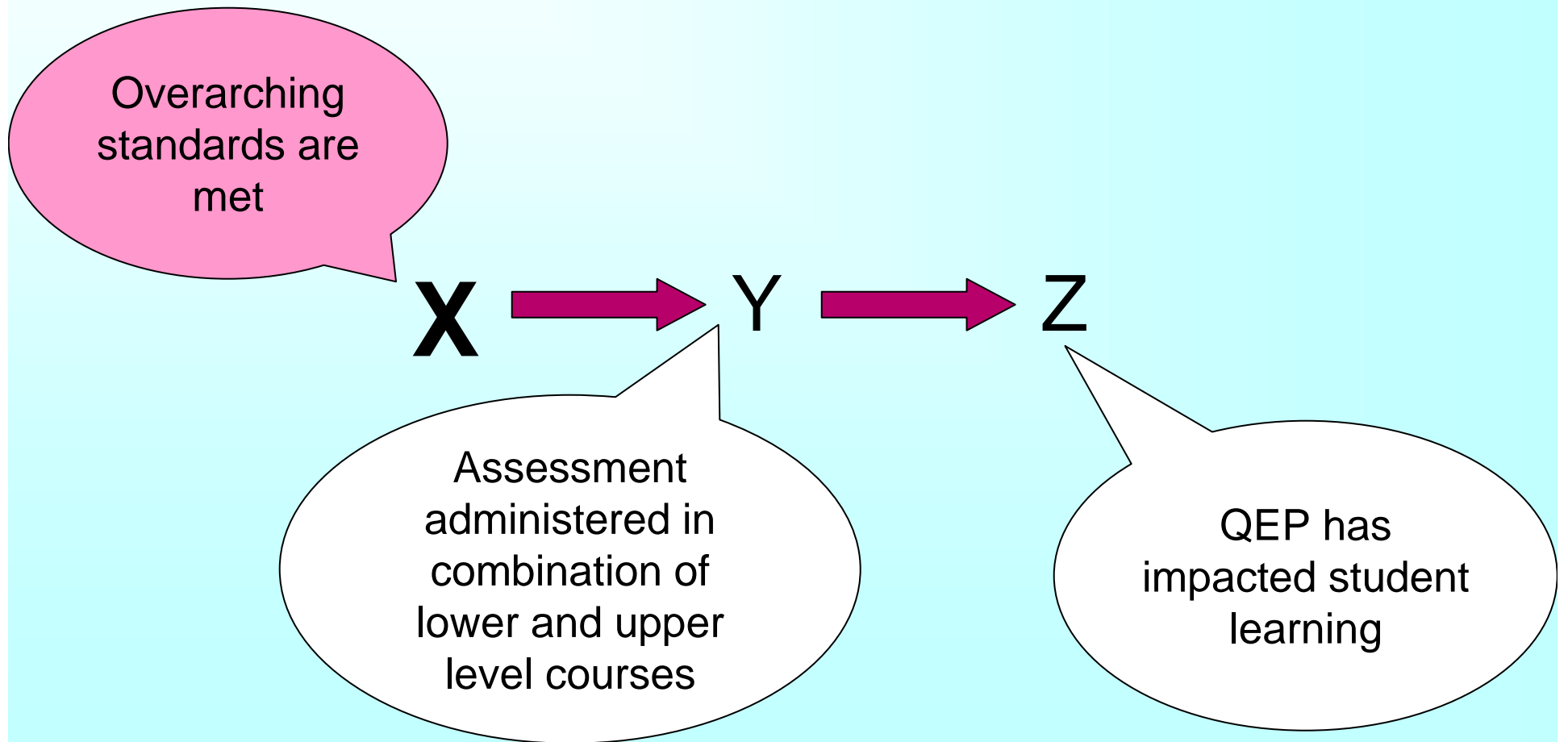
- QEP Objective 1a: Demonstrate knowledge of the issues related to economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- QEP Objective 1b: Demonstrate the ability to analyze local and global environmental issues.
- QEP Objective 1c: Participate in collaborative projects requiring analysis of environmental issues.

## ***QEP Goal 2: Exhibit community involvement.***

- QEP Objective 2a: Demonstrate understanding of the complex relationships between individuals and communities.
- QEP Objective 2b: Demonstrate the ability to analyze sustainability within the context of community.
- QEP Objective 2c: Participate in collaborative service-learning projects that foster an ecological perspective.

# Quality Enhancement Plan: IMPACT REPORT

...direct impact on student learning including the achievement of goals and outcomes...



# References

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- Bridges, L., & Rickenbacker, W. F. (1993). *The art of persuasion: A National review rhetoric for writers*. New York: Continuum.
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