

Texas A&M University Preparation for SACS Accreditation Executive Summary

The Commission on Colleges (COC) evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations of Quality Enhancement* (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/PrinciplesOfAccreditation.PDF>, 2004).

Within these standards, there are 2 main requirements related to ongoing assessment practices at institutions of higher education. SACS requires all institutions to have

An **Institutional Effectiveness (IE)** process that constitutes a continuous, ongoing review activity to ensure and improve the quality of its programs, and

A **Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)** which an institution engages in as a specific, time-limited project chosen by the institution specifically for that accreditation cycle. The QEP is expected to address “a well-defined issue or issues directly related to improving student learning”

SACS evaluates institutions of higher education in a two-stage process. Institutions first submit a compliance report, which documents that the institution meets each and every SACS requirement, including those for institutional effectiveness. The compliance report is reviewed by an off-site review team that raises any concerns it has in a preliminary report. Then, six weeks in advance of an on-site review, the institution submits its QEP to the Commission. When the SACS site visit team comes to the university, it raises any concerns that came up in the compliance review, but otherwise focuses on the QEP.

Timeline for next Texas A&M reaffirmation (working backwards):

- December 2012--reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
- April 2012--visiting team on campus.
- October 2011--off-site compliance review of our documentation of adherence to SACS requirements.
- Summer 2011--rollup of 2009-10 IE cycle, and QEP.
- Fall 2010-Spring 2011--preparation on campus of documentation for off-site compliance review.
- Summer 2010--rollup of 2009-2010 IE cycle and QEP.
- Summer 2009--rollup of 2008-2009 IE cycle and QEP.
- Summer 2008--rollup of 2007-2008 IE cycle and QEP.
- Summer 2007--adoption by university units of unit IE processes. Incorporation of administration and academic support services into IE process. (Note: possibilities by unit are shift current IE method, adopt different IE method than current, or adopt IE for first time.)
- Summer 2006--adoption of assessment framework for academic programs: central services, driven by units, faculty involvement, simple, to the point. Revision of Assessment Plan format.

What are SACS expectations regarding Institutional Effectiveness?

There are four main expectations.

1. SACS expects an integrated university-wide assessment process:

“The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement, and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission” *Principles of Accreditation*, Core Requirement 2.5.

2. SACS expects all academic programs and support services to identify and assess outcomes and use the results of the assessment to improve what they do.

“The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results” *Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1

3. SACS expects academic programs to assess student learning:

“The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes” (p.22). *Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1

4. SACS expects institutions to assess their general education core:

“The institution identifies college-level competencies with the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies” *Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1

How do we expect Texas A&M to meet these expectations for Institutional Effectiveness?

Assessment Plans and Assessment Reports. These expectations can be met by instituting a regular review process for all academic programs and administrative and educational support services. Each academic program would need to develop or revise an **Assessment Plan**. The Assessment Plan would identify *program objectives*, *program outcomes* (including *learning outcomes* for academic programs) and methods of measuring the outcomes. Once assessment plans are developed, programs would need to begin following the plans, by collecting data, evaluating the results, and writing **Assessment Reports**, probably on an annual or biennial cycle. The Assessment Reports will document how the results of the assessment are used to improve programs.

How would the Assessment Plans differ from the previous IE plans?

In a lot of ways assessment plans would be similar to the previous IE plans. Academic programs would be expected report program outcomes and measures for evaluating the outcomes.

We expect four main differences:

- Every academic program would articulate program and student learning outcomes developed by faculty in the program and approved by the department and college.
- There would be more focus on direct measures of student learning.
- Assessment reports would do a more thorough job of documenting how assessment is used to improve the quality of academic programs.
- The assessment process would be more integrated into the way deans and the administration evaluate academic units.

What are SACS expectations regarding Quality Enhancement Plans?

The basic idea is that instead of the former self-studies that SACS required during each accreditation cycle, that institutions will now instead engage in a university-wide project directly related to improving student learning.

Texas A&M's revised QEP—designed to focus on improving undergraduate research and inquiry-based learning—is appropriate as such a project. It is separate from the Institutional Effectiveness process, though it could contribute to it.

It's not clear yet, what SACS expects when an institution gets around to its second QEP—which TAMU will be the first to do.

How do we expect Texas A&M to meet the expectations for Quality Enhancement Plans?

We are on track with the new, revised QEP under the leadership of Martyn Gunn.

How will this all be managed?

The Office of Institutional Assessment that will report through Paul Meyer to Bill Perry will have the primary responsibility for coordinating and supporting the Institutional Effectiveness Process, QEP, and other required institutional assessments. Disciplinary accreditation will continue to be done within the appropriate units.