

# Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

## Accreditation Requirements Then and Now

## Presentation Objectives:

- Provide a brief description of SACS COC & its philosophy of accreditation
- Compare the accreditation process under the *Criteria* and the *Principles*
- Provide a brief overview of the accreditation process under the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*

# Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

- Founded in 1895, in Atlanta, Georgia
- Voluntary association of educational institutions
- Comprised of
  - Commission on Secondary and Middle Schools
  - Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools
  - Commission on Colleges (COC)

# Commission on Colleges (COC)

- Founded in 1912 to develop standards and a process for accrediting colleges and universities in the South.



# Commission on Colleges (COC)

- Now recognized by the US Department of Education as the regional accrediting body for institutions awarding Associates, Baccalaureate, Masters and Doctoral degrees in 11 southern states and Latin America.
- Member of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

# Commission on Colleges (COC)

- College Delegate Assembly (CDA)
- Commissioners
- Executive Council
- Committees on Compliance and Reports

# College Delegate Assembly (CDA)

- Includes one voting representative from each accredited member institution (800)
- Meets annually
- Elects 77 members of the Commission
- Approves revisions to accrediting standards
- Approves dues formulas
- Elects Appeals Committee from CEOs of accredited member institutions

# Commission

77 members

- 22 representatives from Level I institutions
- 33 representatives from Level II-IV institutions
- 11 at-large representatives from accredited member institutions
- 11 representatives of the public

# Commission

- Prepares statement of standards
- Makes visits
- Takes final action on accreditation
- Reports to CDA at annual meeting
- Elects Executive Committee
- Reviews Substantive Change Prospectus

# Texas Commissioners

- Alvin (Bud) O. Austin, President, LeTourneau University, Longview (*Executive Council Member and Chair of State Delegation*)
- John R. Brazil, President, Trinity University, San Antonio
- Leonardo de la Garza, Chancellor, Tarrant County College District, Fort Worth
- Martha Ellis, President, Lee College, Baytown
- Elva Concha LeBlanc, President, Galveston College, Galveston
- Adair W. Margo, El Paso (*Public Representative and Executive Council Member*)
- Royce L. Money, President, Abilene Christian University, Abilene
- Norval F. Pohl, President, University of North Texas, Denton
- Jesse W. Rogers, President, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls
- William A. Staples, President, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Houston
- Denise M. Trauth, President, Texas State University-San Marcos, San Marcos
- George C. Wright, President, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View

# Executive Council

Consists of 13 members elected from  
Commissioners

- One representative from each state
- A chair
- A public member

# Executive Council

- Interprets policy and procedures
- Approves Commission budget
- Individual members chair their state's delegation of commissioners
- Individual members coordinate their state's nomination process for electing Commissioners

# Philosophy/Characteristics of Accreditation

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary
- Accreditation is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.
- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.

# Philosophy/Characteristics of Accreditation

- The process stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation is self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.

# Philosophy/Characteristics of Accreditation

- Accreditation implies that an institution has ensured that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.
- Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.

# Philosophy/Characteristics of Accreditation

The accreditation process provides an assessment of

- an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission,
- its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association,
- and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services.

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

A self-study steering committee and a dozen or more self-study committees

## 2002 Principles

A small leadership team overseeing compliance certification reporting

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Completion of an  
extensive and  
evaluative self-study  
report

## 2002 Principles

Submission of a concise  
compliance  
certification report  
(no self-study)

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Submission of  
documents every  
10 years

## 2002 Principles

Submission of  
documents every 5  
years

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Coordination by  
the institution's  
self-study director  
every 10 years

## 2002 Principles

Continuous annual  
coordination by  
the institution's  
accreditation  
liaison

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Faculty-dominated  
self-study  
evaluations and  
report preparation

## 2002 Principles

Administrator-  
dominated  
compliance  
certification with a  
faculty-dominated  
Quality  
Enhancement Plan  
(QEP)

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Campus-wide involvement that focuses on institutional compliance with "must" statements

## 2002 Principles

Campus-wide involvement that focuses on Quality Enhancement Planning (QEP) for improved student learning

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

An on-site peer review that involves a large visiting committee comprised of many different specialists examining all operations

## 2002 Principles

An on-site peer review that involves a small visiting committee comprised of specialists focused primarily on the QEP

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Focus on  
Institutional Effectiveness

## 2002 Principles

Focus on  
Student Learning

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Conditions of Eligibility

## 2002 Principles

Integrity and Quality  
Enhancement

# THEN AND NOW

## 1984 Criteria

Quality = Processes

## 2002 Principles

Quality = Outcomes

# Accreditation Process

- Collective analysis and judgment by the institution's internal constituencies
- An informed review by peers external to the institution
- Reasoned decision by the elected members of the Commission on Colleges

# *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*

- Section I: Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation
- Section II: Core Requirements (12)
- Section III: Comprehensive Standards (53)
- Section IV: Federal Requirements (8)

# *Principles*

“The first task of the Commission when considering an institution’s accreditation status is to determine the institution’s **INTEGRITY** and its **COMMITMENT** to **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT.**”

# INTEGRITY

“The Commission’s requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.”

“The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions.”

# INTEGRITY

“Evidence of intentionally withholding information, deliberately providing inaccurate information to the public, or failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission will be seen as the lack of a full commitment to integrity and may result in the loss of membership in the Commission on Colleges.”

# Commitment to Quality Enhancement

“The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their missions, resources, and capacities, and to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occur.”

# Commitment to Quality Enhancement

“The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission’s philosophy of accreditation;

this presumes each member institution is engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission.”

# Commitment to Quality Enhancement

“...an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major aspects.”

# Core Requirements

The necessity for all programs and services to support the institution's mission, the qualifications of personnel, and the quality and effectiveness of programs and services are issues addressed throughout the Core Requirements.

# Core Requirement 2.12 (QEP)

Requires the institution to develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan based on a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment for supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.

# Core Requirement 2.12

- The QEP
  - Outlines a course of action for institutional improvement,
  - Addresses one or more issues that contribute to institutional quality,
  - Focuses special attention on student learning.
  - Provides clear-cut objectives, ways to measure the outcomes of those objectives and proof that those objectives are being continued into the future - all focused on the primary desired outcome of quality education for the student.

# Comprehensive Standards

- Three areas:
  - Institutional mission, governance, effectiveness
  - Programs
  - Resources

# Comprehensive Standards

It is implicit in every Comprehensive Standard mandating a policy or procedure that the policy/procedure is in writing, approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

# Federal Requirements

- Included in accreditation process to ensure continued freedom of institutions to be self regulating.
- In order to receive federal financial aid funding, the college must be in compliance with the *Title IV* requirements of the 1998 *Higher Education Amendments*.

# Components of the Peer Review Process

- Review by the institution
  - Compliance certification
  - Quality Enhancement Plan
- Review by the Commission
  - Off-site Peer review
  - On-site Peer Review

# Steps in the Reaffirmation Process

1. Commission staff conducts orientation for institution's Leadership Team
2. Institution submits Compliance Certification and supporting documents

# Steps in the Reaffirmation Process

3. Off-site Review Committee reviews Compliance Certification for compliance with Comprehensive Standards and Core Requirements, except CR 2.12 (QEP) and prepares report
4. Oral report to institution; Off-site Committee report to On-site Committee

# Steps in the Reaffirmation Process

5. Institution submits Quality Enhancement Plan (CR 2.12)
6. On-site Review Committee visits institution to review and determine acceptability of QEP, areas of non-compliance or other areas of concern and submits its report to Commission

# Steps in the Reaffirmation Process

7. Institution prepares response to On-Site Committee's report and submits it to Commission
8. Commission reviews findings of On-site Committee and institution's response; takes action on the institution's reaffirmation.

# Substantive Change

- SACS COC accredits an entire institution and its programs and services wherever they are located or however they are delivered.
- SACS COC reviews all substantive changes that occur between decennial reviews to determine whether the change has affected the quality of the total institution.

# Types of Substantive Change

1. Notification and approval prior to implementation
  - When institution opens new campus where students can earn 50% or more of credits toward a degree (South Austin Campus)
2. Notification only
  - When institution expands distance learning programs offered electronically.

# Types of Substantive Change

3. Review and approval of consolidations/mergers—when two distinct institutions combine or transfer assets to a newly-formed institution.

# Substantive Change Process

- Institution submits prospectus and pays fee
- COC may accept prospectus and approve change with or without a site visit.
- COC may refer prospectus to Committee on Compliance and Reports for review.

# Substantive Change Process

Committee on Compliance and Reports may

1. Accept the prospectus and approve without site visit
2. Defer action and seek additional information
3. Deny approval, but continue institution's accreditation

# Substantive Change Process

If a Substantive Change Committee is authorized to visit the institution, it will be charged with determining whether the [entire] institution is in compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

# Substantive Change Process

- Committee on Compliance and Reports
  - May recommend that the institution's accreditation be continued
  - May recommend discontinuing accreditation
- Commission makes final decision

# More Information

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>

<http://sacscoc.org>