

SACS REAFFIRMATION NEWSLETTER



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The University of Louisiana at Monroe

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SACS Reaffirmation: A Summary

Eric Pani, Associate Provost and SACS Liaison

Member institutions of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) must reaffirm their accreditation every ten years. For ULM, that reaffirmation occurs in 2009.

Since our last reaffirmation, SACS has replaced its 462 "must statements" with 80 standards and requirements. Central to reaffirmation is the concept of continuous quality improvement: the integration of strategic planning, operations, and assessment processes leading to better student learning.

Strategic planning establishes goals, objectives, and tasks to improve student learning. Operations carry out those tasks, and assessments determine the effectiveness of the operations. Based on these results, the strategic plan is altered to effect improved student learning, operations are adjusted accordingly, and assessments begin again, closing the loop on the processes.

A "closed loop" is essential for SACS reaffirmation, but so is integrity. Integrity must govern the operation of the institution and its relationships with all parties.

SACS' *Principles of Accreditation* will guide us through reaffirmation. Most work will be done in small committees that address these principles and produce our Compliance Certification document. An off-site committee will review this document and advise an on-site review team about the degree to which the university is in compliance with SACS principles and federal requirements.

The on-site team will consider these recommendations and review the quality enhancement plan (QEP) developed by the broader university community. During a campus visit, the committee will examine data and conduct interviews to evaluate the QEP and ascertain the university's compliance with the *Principles*.

This team's report and any institutional response will then be reviewed by SACS. The final decision about reaffirmation will be made by the Commission on Colleges and announced at its annual meeting in December 2009.

You can keep up with the reaffirmation process at: <http://www.ulm.edu/sacs2009/>.

2007 University Survey

Eric Pani, Associate Provost and SACS Liaison

Strategic planning is important to SACS because it establishes a plan that we expect will lead to improved student learning. ULM has been operating under its current strategic plan since 2003 (see <http://www.ulm.edu/strategicplanning/level1/index.html>). A review in 2006-2007 by the Strategic Planning Committee concluded that much of the current plan was accomplished and a new plan was needed (see http://www.ulm.edu/strategicplanning/documents/2003-04_progress_report.pdf).

While that evaluation was useful, multiple measures yield more robust conclusions. Therefore, President James Cofer asked Professors Harry Hale and Skeet Creekmore, faculty members experienced with surveys, to adapt—with permission—an instrument used by Mississippi State University (MSU) to determine perceptions about the institution.

ULM's University Survey went online for faculty, staff, students, and alumni from October 9 through November 21. Physical

Plant staff were also provided paper surveys since many of them do not have access to computers.

More than 2,000 people completed the survey, and the results supported the Strategic Planning Committee's conclusions.

- 97% believe that ULM is moving forward.
- 96% believe that ULM students receive a high quality education.
- 91% believe that diversity in the classroom is important to a college education.
- 90% believe that ULM promotes and markets the university well.
- 90% believe that ULM has strong academics compared to other regional peer institutions.

Complete results from the survey are available at <http://www.ulm.edu/sacs2009/survey.html>.

ULM will close the loop by using all of this information to develop a new strategic plan that will improve student learning. For more about that plan, see Ken Clow's article on the next page.

A Faculty Member's Experience at the 2007 SACS Annual Meeting

Pamela Higgins Saulsberry, Professor and SACS Leadership Team Member

Student learning outcomes, departmental goals, assessments, faculty database entries, and QEP: these words and phrases have haunted many faculty members over the past few years. After attending the SACS Commission on Colleges Annual Meeting in December, I now have a different perspective of these formally haunting references. I went, I saw, and I now appreciate the SACS accreditation mandates that are the impetus behind the work required to translate these words and phrases into action that will result in a reaffirmation of ULM's accreditation status. It was beneficial

to interact with and receive information and explanation from the individuals who make the SACS rules. Attending this SACS conference provided valuable insight into the "why" of this process. It afforded me as a faculty member the opportunity to discuss the SACS requirements with educators from other colleges and learn from their experiences and struggles with this arduous but compulsory process.

To be able to attend "how to" workshops and roundtable discussions and receive practical information on how to negotiate the reaffirmation process from the inside (the classroom) out (the

administration), was very beneficial. To hear such accomplished keynote speakers as Dr. Samuel Bantances and Dr. Ben Carson, whose very presence provided the examples of why we educate and have standards for the educational process, allowed me to make peace with this inevitable process and its inherent headaches. I am now more appreciative of the SACS reaffirmation process and more fully understand the crucial role of faculty members in it. After all, it is either deal with the process that validates the fact that ULM has earned reaccreditation or deal with the alternative.

Important Dates

- April 18, 2008
Compliance Certification Sample
- September 10, 2008
Compliance Certification Due
- October 3, 2008
Draft Quality Enhancement Plan
- November 3-6, 2008
Off-site Peer Review
- February 2, 2009
Quality Enhancement Plan Due
- March 24-26, 2009
On-site Peer Review
- August 1, 2009
Response to On-site Team Report
- December 5-8, 2009
Commission on Colleges Review

Strategic Planning

Kenneth Clow, Biedenharn Professor of Business and Chair, Strategic Planning Committee

The 2007-2012 strategic planning process for the university began in September 2007 with a small drafting committee of Eric Pani, Jeff Cass, Richard Hood, Stan Williamson, and Ken Clow. The vision and mission statements were revised. Corresponding goals were developed based on the revised vision and mission statements. Each goal was then supplemented with a strategy for achieving the goal and a number of measurable objectives.

This initial draft was evaluated by the Vice-Presidents and Division Heads. The draft of the strategic plan was also sent to the ULM Strategic Planning Steering Committee for further evaluation. Modifications were made at both levels.

After input at these various levels, the process of developing action plans and tactics began. It started with five subcommittees of faculty and staff, involving over 75 individuals. Additional input was gathered from faculty during two open forums held during the Spring 2008 Faculty Week. An additional meeting was held with

staff members who would be involved in various components of the strategic plan.

We are now in the process of compiling all of this input into a single strategic planning document. The plan will then go back to the University Strategic Planning Steering Committee for evaluation and editing. During the next two months, we hope to put the finishing touches on the strategic plan and be ready to move onto the next stage of strategic planning.

The input of faculty and staff has been extremely valuable. It has resulted in a document that is the work of the university community and reflects the thinking of the university as a whole. It is not finished yet, so if you have ideas or thoughts, please send those to me at clow@ulm.edu. I will pass them on to our steering committee for evaluation. If you would like to review a copy of the strategic plan draft, it is available at <http://www.ulm.edu/strategicplanning>.

Assessment and Evaluation

Allison Loftin, Director, Office of Assessment and Evaluation and SACS Leadership Team Member

In terms of assessment and evaluation procedures, the processes for reaffirming SACS accreditation stress the ease of information review. Our off-site reviewers will be unfamiliar with ULM and will be simultaneously examining documents from two to four other institutions. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that they be able to efficiently access and review the documentation of our efforts to ensure continuous improvement.

For this reason, the reaffirmation process has been an impetus for ULM to consolidate and standardize all of its assessment and evaluation procedures. Unit planning and evaluation, general education assessment, and degree program assessment now all have common templates for the planning and implementation of effectiveness systems, as well as for the reporting of results and for how those results are used for improvement.

In addition to ease of access for reviewers, the processes and systems for accessing and completing these templates should be easy

for ULM faculty and staff to use. Through our efforts toward continual improvement, the Office of Assessment and Evaluation is monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of these processes. We want to ensure that we recognize any opportunities for positive change.

In the coming weeks, the Office of Assessment and Evaluation will be reviewing plans and reports to ensure that they are completed. We also will be alerting unit administrators and supervisors to any areas that still need maintenance. As always, please feel free to contact us with any questions about plans, or about the use of the web-based systems now in place.

Your help in updating and maintaining assessment and evaluation information is vital to successful reaffirmation. Faculty and staff are always the driving force behind the success of assessment and evaluation procedures, and your continued support and diligent efforts highlight your dedication to the quality of every aspect of this institution.

THE
SACS
KEYSTONES

Integrity

**Continuous
Improvement**

The Quality Enhancement Plan

Jeffrey Cass, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences and Chair, QEP Steering Committee

The purpose of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is to implement a project for ULM's accreditation that focuses on some aspect of student learning. Its scope should encompass a large number of students across the colleges and involve a wide spectrum of members from the campus community and the community at large in brainstorming sessions about possible topics.

Education about the QEP has been ongoing for some time. For both University Week in August

2007 and during the fall semester, eleven presentations on the QEP introduced faculty, staff, administrators, students, and alumni to its purpose and scope.

Ideas for the QEP were solicited during the fall and a web site was made available to submit those ideas. Some of the colleges assigned ad hoc committees to develop topics for the QEP while others simply submitted their ideas through the QEP page of the university's SACS website.

The QEP Steering Committee

reviewed and discussed all topics submitted and sent five of the best topics, along with a mini-prospectus of each topic, to the SACS Leadership Team. The five topics are diversity, core curriculum redesign, student writing, student engagement, and non-traditional learners. The mini-prospectuses included budgetary estimates and possible assessments and performance indicators.

The Leadership Team will make a final selection for the QEP topic this month, sending its choice back

to the QEP Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will then research the selected topic, draft and provide documentation for the QEP document, devise a public relations campaign to inform the campus about the QEP topic and everyone's role in the QEP, revise the document based on the suggestions from those in the campus community, and finally submit the final version of the QEP to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) for initial off-site review.