

SACS REAFFIRMATION NEWSLETTER



March 12, 2008

The University of Louisiana at Monroe

Volume 1, Issue 2

Continuous Improvement and SACS

Eric Pani, Associate Provost and SACS Liaison

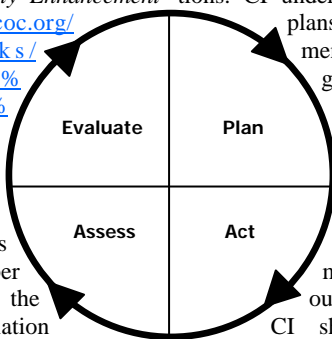
“A commitment to continuous improvement is at the heart of an ongoing planning and evaluation process. It is a continuous, cyclical process that is participative, flexible, relevant, and responsive.” These statements, taken from SACS’s *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/handbooks/Exhibit%2031.Resource%20Manual.pdf>), underscore how important continuous improvement (CI) is among the member institutions of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The diagram at the right depicts the CI cycle. We usually begin that cycle when we **plan** a course into the future. Tactics included in the plan lead people to **act** in such a way that progress is made toward achieving the plan’s goals and/or objectives. We then **assess** the extent to which we have made

progress toward our goals. Finally, we use the results from our assessment to **evaluate** our plan’s success in achieving improvement. The cycle is completed and begins again when we use the evaluation to plan for further improvement.

SACS wants CI to permeate every aspect of its member institutions. CI underpins our strategic plans, our unit assessment plans, our program assessment plans, and our general education assessment plan. It should also be evident in our personnel assessments and even in our courses. In short, CI should be everywhere.

Unfortunately, we often fail to “close the loop” by using the outcomes of our assessment to evaluate and then adjust our plan so that we are constantly making our institution, our courses, and ourselves better. Are you closing the loop and continuously seeking improvement?



My Experience with Compliance Certification: 1

Teina Landrum, Director of Recreational Services

Many of us have been writing a part of the SACS Compliance Certification Report or have provided information to someone who is writing a part of the report. I am a part of the Student Welfare and Services Committee. The writing process involves significant research to document what our institution is doing regarding each principle. Surprisingly, the educational experience accompanying the SACS reaffirmation process parallels the learning experience associated with attending a good professional conference.

Each year, Ashley Harper and I attend what we consider to be the best professional meeting for exercise physiologists in the fitness industry: the American College of Sports Medicine’s (ACSM) Health & Fitness Summit. At the meeting, we receive updated information on guidelines and standards for best professional practices. We hear many excellent presentations and come away with a good understanding of the latest research and trends. We learn who is doing the interesting work in our field across the country. We compare what we

are doing at the Activity Center with the industry standards and the work of our peers. We experience that great sense of affirmation that goes with knowing you are on track. We identify areas of our work that need adjustments, make action plans for improvements and discover new things to make our programs and services even better.

How does writing the SACS Compliance Certification Report parallel the professional meeting? We have studied the standards to which we are held accountable as an institution. Our research has allowed us to examine, define and compare what we are doing as an institution in response to the expectations associated with each standard. We have looked at what our sister universities are doing and know how our efforts compare. Finally, this process has allowed us to: experience the affirmation that goes with knowing we are in compliance with the SACS requirements and standards, develop a plan to improve areas of weakness, and define the new things we want to do to continue our mission of excellence at ULM.

Assessment and Evaluation: Assessment Forms

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

Many of you have been working diligently to comply with requests for information about unit performance and to transfer existing assessment data to a new format. There is never a convenient time to perform chores such as this, and I appreciate the effort and time that has been expended. While I have spoken to many of you about the reasons for this transfer, I would like to take this opportunity to reach those of you who might still be wondering about the need for these changes.

External off- and on-site reviewers examine tremendous amounts of information so easy access to documentation allows them to

quickly grasp our efforts toward continual improvement. From the Audit of Institutional Effectiveness Measures conducted by the SACS Integrated Planning and Evaluation Committee, it is clear that we take enormous care to measure our performance, but we must present clear and concise summaries of what those measures are, how they relate to the mission and goals of each unit, the levels of performance we expect to reach, and how we use this information to improve. The new formatting of the Unit Evaluation plans will make the examination of masses of this information simple and clear while

also clarifying our own internal blueprints for success and improvement within each unit.

The information that you provide in the Unit Evaluation templates will soon be transferred by my office into an updated web-based entry and archival system. This system will serve as a user-friendly access point for our reviewers and as the central evaluation planning and reporting access point for units. The simplicity of the new forms and the ease of use of the new web system will facilitate continual improvement, so I look forward to presenting this new tool to you in the coming months.

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

My Experience with Compliance Certification: 2

Robert Hanser, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice

During the past few months, I have had the distinct pleasure of working with several of my colleagues to complete the SACS Compliance Certification document for our university. I must say that I have found the entire experience to be quite enjoyable. One reason for this is that this process has allowed me to gain a better understanding of our university operations and the means by which those operations can and should be measured. This has been particularly insightful for me as a junior faculty member since I have been given a glimpse of the inner workings of many departmental and service unit programs across the university.

I have been pleasantly surprised to find that ULM departments and service units do a very good job of recording performance data. In addition, it would appear that these departments consistently use that data to shape their future goals and activities. To me, that is the very ideal of what is commonly referred to as a learning organization.

Learning organizations have the inherent ability to adapt and

change, improving performance through continual revision of goals, objectives, policies, and procedures. Throughout this process, learning organizations respond to the various pushes and pulls that are placed upon them by utilizing a continual process of data-driven, cyclical, and responsive decision-making that results in heightened adaptability of the organization. From my experience in assessing the ULM strategic plan and the various components of the university, it is clear to me that ULM is indeed a learning organization.

When reflecting upon this, it makes me proud to be part of the ULM community. It is a purposeful community that has a well-constructed plan and a firmly set course of action. This course of action is achieved one semester at a time and has resulted in an institution of higher learning that promotes excellence and social responsibility. I can think of no more noble a course of action. It is with that in mind that I have found my experience working toward SACS reaffirmation to be particularly rewarding.

Compliance Certification: Status Report

Eric Pani, Associate Provost and SACS Liaison

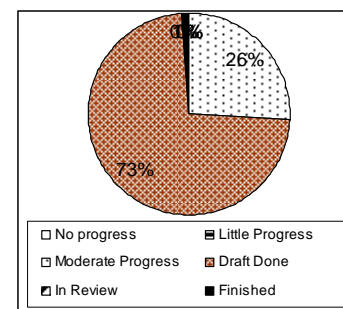
The Compliance Certification is a document in which the university demonstrates the extent to which it is in compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements that constitute SACS's *Principles of Accreditation* (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008%20Interim%20Principles%20108.pdf>).

Eight committees of faculty, staff, and students have been working together since early in the fall semester to write this document and assemble the evidence that demonstrates our compliance with the principles. Chairing these committees are Dr. Mark Arant, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Mr. Dave Nicklas, Vice President for Business Affairs; Dr. Lisa Colvin, Interim Director of Graduate Studies and Research; Mr. Don Smith, Dean of the Library; Ms. Allison Loftin, Director of the Office of Assessment and Evaluation; Dr. Wayne Brumfield, Vice President for Student Affairs; and Dr. Jeffrey Cass, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Many others are also working on these committees,

finding documents, collecting data, and synthesizing information before writing and revising, then writing and revising some more.

Progress in developing a draft document has kept on track for our target deadline in early April. At this time, I estimate that approximately 73% of the principles have completed drafts. The pie chart below will give you a more complete picture of where we stand.

With a completed draft, we will begin editing the document so that it has a consistent voice and, since it is a web site, verify the link to each piece of evidence. Access to the web site is currently restricted to those working on the document, but we will open it to all ULM employees and students in the fall.



The Quality Enhancement Plan

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

The campus community can now weigh in on the research available on Student Engagement and its theoretical and practical connections to the Quality Enhancement Plan. Simply log in to the QEP's Moodle site (<http://www.ulm.edu/sacs2009/qep.html>) and click on the relevant research links. (You must register for Moodle, or you will not be able to see the information.) There is a bibliography, from which you can hyperlink to most of the cited essays. Some of the essays are available as PDF docu-

ments, also on the Moodle site. In addition, the Provost has purchased fifteen key books relevant to student engagement and student learning, which will soon be available for review in Dr. Cass's conference room (Admin 1-45). Eventually, the campus community will also be able to see the discussions and drafts of the QEP through the Wiki portion of the site. At this point, the external and internal research subcommittees, headed up respectively by Jeffrey Cass and Allison Loftin, are busy at work

drafting the research sections of the QEP and will present them to the QEP Steering Committee at its next meeting in early April.

The discussion board is also available for viewing, which at this point concerns the precise formulation of the QEP's purpose. Casting the purpose succinctly and clearly is a key step in publicizing the QEP, and the committee has agreed upon the following: "The purpose of the QEP is to increase student engagement in learning through course redesign, incorporating best

practices of instructional strategies and technologies." The purpose thus suggests that student learning at ULM depends on student engagement. Indeed, the discussion throughout the QEP will be structured along the lines of student engagement in courses, their place within the campus culture, and the interconnections and resonances within the community at large. Courses, Campus, Community—the three pillars of the QEP and its emphasis on redesign!

Interested in serving as a SACS peer reviewer?

Two teams of peer reviewers are involved in the SACS reaffirmation process:

- an *off-site team* that performs the initial review of the Compliance Certification document and does most of its work at home before assembling in Atlanta during the fall to write its report of findings, and
- an *on-site team* that visits the institution in the spring, investigates the findings of the off-site team, verifies compliance with other standards, reviews the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan, and then writes its report of findings.

This work, while voluntary, can provide valuable professional experience. If you are interested in being a peer reviewer for SACS, email pani@ulm.edu for more information.