Workshop on Writing the Compliance Certification Report

DEL MAR COLLEGE
JANUARY 30, 2009
The Big Picture

- **Goal:** An administrative response to:
  - 15 Core Requirements
  - 52 Comprehensive Standards
  - 7 Federal Requirements

- **Format:** Electronic and print

- **Deadline:** March 15, 2010
What Will It Look Like?

- Chipola College, Florida
  http://www.chipola.edu/SACSO7/

- Southeastern Louisiana University
  http://www2.selu.edu/sacs/report/report_index.htm

- Western Kentucky University
  http://www.wku.edu/sacs/SACS%20Final/main.htm#sacs2
How Long Will It Be?
How Long Will It Be?

We don’t know.
On One Hand...

- **SACS says**: “Think like a reviewer...someone who doesn’t know anything about your school or your state....”
Which Implies...

- Detail
- Depth
- Comprehensiveness
- Background
On the Other Hand...

SACS says: “Brevity is a virtue!”
Advice From Other Schools

Principles derived at the SACS conference in S.A. in December:

Mostly From:
- Western Carolina University
- Chipola College
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- U.T.S.A.
First, all of them said to...

- **Break down** the standard or requirement into its components...

- Then use the components to structure your response
For Example:

Here’s Core Requirement 2.5:

“The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.”
These Are the Important Words:

Here’s Core Requirement 2.5:

“The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.”
“The institution engages in

- Ongoing,
- Integrated, and
- Institution-wide

Research-based planning and evaluation processes that

- Incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals and outcomes;
- Result in continuing improvement institutional quality; and
- Demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.
Chipola College, on the other hand, did this:

1. Planning processes are ongoing
2. Planning processes are integrated
3. Planning processes are institution-wide
4. Planning processes are research-based
5. Evaluation processes incorporate systematic review of mission
6. Evaluation processes incorporate systematic review of goals
7. Evaluation processes incorporate systematic review of outcomes
8. Processes result in continuing improvement
9. Processes demonstrate that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission
Here’s How I’d Do It:

- The institution engages in **planning and evaluation**:

  The *planning* is ongoing.
  The *planning* is integrated.
  The *planning* is institution-wide.
  The *planning* is research-based.

  The *evaluation* is ongoing.
  The *evaluation* is integrated.
  The *evaluation* is institution-wide.
  The *evaluation* is research-based.

  And...
And...

The **planning** incorporates a systematic review of:
- Institutional mission
- Institutional goals
- Institutional outcomes

The **planning** results in continuing improvement in institutional quality.

The **planning** demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

And...
And...

The evaluation incorporates a systematic review of:
- Institutional mission
- Institutional goals
- Institutional outcomes

The evaluation results in continuing improvement in institutional quality.

The evaluation demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.
...if you use the “components” to structure the response, you can see how “clunky” it could become
So...

- So, use a thorough “Break Down” to understand and analyze the response
- Then use your judgment to shape the narrative
SACS provides some guidance in its *Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*—the blue book.

Go to the link below, and then to p. 47, Appendix C and D:

...Google something like “SACS compliance certification.” Dozens or hundreds will pop up.
1. ...remember that they don’t necessarily know how to do it any better than you do and...

2. ...Don’t plagiarize.
When You Start Writing:

Everyone emphasized:

• Accuracy
• Accessibility
• Clarity
• Concision

So, some things to consider:
Active vs. Passive Voice

- **Active**: subject performs the action of the verb
- **Passive**: subject receives the action of the verb

**Passive**: “All curriculum changes are authorized by the curriculum committee.”

**Active**: “The curriculum committee authorizes all curriculum changes.”
In General, Use the Active Voice...

- Usually considered “stronger”
- Usually more concise
- More likely to assign responsibility
- Usually “sounds” better
Nominalization

Which is:

Turning a verb or an adjective into a noun
“Department chairs provide an evaluation of candidates.”

Could become:

“Department chairs evaluate candidates.”
“Budget cuts constitute a threat to faculty development programs.”

Could become:

“Budget cuts threaten faculty development programs.”
In General, Avoid Nominalizations...

• They’re less concise

• And they often distract from the more important verb in the sentence
Expletives

These are “Filler” words, like: “There are/is...” or “It is...”

They don’t really carry much weight on their own.
“There are several programs designed to provide academic support to students.”

Could become:

“Several programs provide academic support to students.”
In General, Avoid Expletives...

...in the interest of concision, clarity, and straightforward writing
Now, Consider this Sentence:

“There have been periodic surveys of students conducted by the college to assess student learning.”
If we get rid of the expletive:

“Periodic surveys of students have been conducted by the college to assess student learning.”
If We Use Active Instead of Passive Voice...

“The college has conducted periodic surveys of students to assess student learning.”
“The college surveys students periodically to assess student learning.”
“The college surveys students periodically to assess student learning.”
“The college surveys its students periodically to assess their learning.”
“The college assesses student learning with a periodic survey.”
“The college assesses student learning with a survey at the end of every spring semester.”
“The college assesses student learning with a six-part survey administered to all sophomores at the end of every spring semester.”

And so on.....
All in Service of....

- A clear determination of compliance or non-
- Clear, comprehensive, candid prose that explains and justifies our position
- Concise writing
- Consistent writing
- Clear and easily accessible evidence
How Do We Make it Consistent?

- Xitracs
- Careful editing and review
- Style Sheet
Another Good Practice...

Find someone who isn’t familiar with your area to read your report with “fresh eyes”...
Deadlines...

- Let’s talk within the next two weeks and negotiate deadlines that works for you...
- Xitracs helps keep track of the deadlines
- Let’s set most of the deadlines in mid-spring
- And have a “drop dead” deadline for the first draft of May 1
But Remember...

These drafts are dynamic...
And, Finally...

The great prose stylist, George Orwell, in “Politics and the English Language,” offered this writing advice:
“Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.”
“Never use a long word where a short one will do.”
“If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.”
“Never use the passive where you can use the active.”
“Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.”
“Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.”
Questions?