SACS Reaffirmation

Stories regarding toolboxes and having the right tools kicked off symbolically the importance of developing our Del Mar College “higher education toolbox.” Knowledge and participation are the required tools in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation process [http://www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

January 9, 2006 marked the beginning of a journey toward SACS Reaffirmation in 2011. The Spring 2006 SACS Planning Conference at Del Mar College East focused on the new SACS reaffirmation process. The “Plan-to-Plan” work for this meeting was a result of the Summer Academy 2005 recommendations which also included the development of a Faculty Credentials Review process and committee (Fall 2005) and increased attendance to the SACS Annual Conference (12/2005). This chronology critically underscores that Del Mar College has positioned faculty as central to the re-affirmation process and the college dialog, a requirement in meeting the SACS, Principles of Accreditation. Booklets of the Principles of Accreditation were provided to participants and are also available at the SACS website [http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp).

Audience members at Wolfe Recital Hall were Del Mar College faculty and a team of selected supervisors of units directly linked with student learning. A total of approximately 300 individuals were present to hear two experienced and noted educators and colleagues from Texas schools who served as presenters to the SACS Planning Conference: Dr. Martha Hughes and Dr. Belinda Newman. Their generous contribution of time is commendable given the hectic pace on campuses as a semester starts.

The new SACS reaffirmation process includes two key components: the compliance certification and the quality enhancement plan (QEP).
The Compliance Certification, submitted fifteen months in advance of an institution’s scheduled reaffirmation, is a document completed by the institution that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards. Signatures by the institution’s chief executive officer and accreditation liaison will be required to certify compliance. By signing the document, the individuals certify that the process of institutional self-assessment has been thorough, honest, and forthright, and that the information contained in the document is truthful, accurate, and complete. (Principles of Accreditation, p. 13).

One part of the compliance certification focuses on faculty credentials and is referred to as a “higher bar” than previously experienced. This one item has become a public embarrassment in some community colleges in the state and accounts for a significant number of recommendations.

Dr. Martha Hughes provided the first presentation, which focused on faculty credentials. Dr. Hughes is the Vice President of Instruction for Eastfield Community College in the Dallas County Community College System. Dr. Hughes has worked on faculty credentials with two campuses (Eastfield and Northlake) and brings with her experience the advice of preventing credentialing nightmares. She continued more focused work with the Faculty Credentials Review Committee (FCRC) and faculty chairpersons in the afternoon session.

The FCRC includes the following faculty and staff: John Detmer, Jim Diehl, Exie Hall, Jim Pierce, Richard Rupp, Karen Williams, Irma Woods, and Darlene Roberts. This committee and the department chairpersons have been working on the documentation the College will need for this critical aspect of reaffirmation. Darlene Roberts is functioning in a leadership role facilitating the work of the Faculty Credentials Review Committee.

Dr. Martha Hughes, Vice President of Instruction, Eastfield Community College provided the Faculty Credentials update for SACS Reaffirmation.

Videotape available in the TLC.

The FCRC is continuing their work on this credentials review. They attended the SACS Annual meeting in December 2005.
The second part of SACS reaffirmation is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the on-site review by the Commission, describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined issue or issues directly related to improving student learning. The development of the QEP involves significant participation by the institution’s academic community. The plan should be focused and succinct (no more than seventy-five pages of narrative text and no more than twenty-pages of support documentation or charts, graphs, and tables). (Principles of Accreditation, p. 13-14).

Dr. Belinda Newman, QEP Director with Collin County Community College, delivered the presentation focused on the QEP.

Dr. Newman outlined the opportunity presented in the Quality Enhancement Plan. This new requirement for reaffirmation is at the heart of the Commission’s philosophy of accreditation since it is expected that institutions dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services with the context of its mission, resources, and capacities. The QEP must include changes in students’ knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values and must be clearly linked to improving the quality of student learning. QEP components include a focused topic, project goals, resources, evaluation methods and strategies, and community involvement and support. QEP’s typically have a main focus and 2-4 sub-goals. The importance of the QEP should be understood by all in the College as well as external groups and therefore requires broad-based involvement.
In the afternoon session Rosie Garcia, Interim Vice President of Instruction, led the group through a review of the QEP timeline and the QEP process at DMC. Some QEP ideas were discussed and this discussion will be enlarged by the QEP Soup-and-Substance discussions scheduled.

The focus topic for the QEP and the various projects comprising it will be linked to the planning and assessment processes of departments and offices, and divisions across the college. The QEP will be distinguished from other on-going initiatives for improvement because it will be, as stated in the SACS guidelines, "sufficiently broad in scope to be viewed as significant to the institution and a major enhancement of the learning experience for students."

As required for SACS reaffirmation, Del Mar College will develop a QEP that will "enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning."

This semester, the entire college community is invited to become involved in the process of identifying possible QEP topics that can be developed into white papers. Again the focus is ideas that are “creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning." Student learning, as defined for a QEP, includes "knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values."

From these white papers the SACS Leadership Team will identify 2-3 fundable areas for further development into mini-theses. This level of development will take the ideas from a “white paper” to a research level. These more sophisticated research papers will then be presented to the college community for developing the consensus and agreed focus area for the QEP.

After the focus has been approved by the SACS Leadership Team the Del Mar College community will be involved in determining the plan's specific activities and assessment measures. Del Mar College’s QEP will be reviewed and approved by SACS. Significant financial resources will be committed to the QEP. Faculty and staff will be engaged in implementing and assessing it over the subsequent five years.
The SACS Evaluation Criteria for the Focus Topic

*The Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation* suggests several criteria that the QEP focus should meet:

- Be "creative and vital to the long-term improvement of student learning,"
- Be "an issue of substance and depth, expected to lead to observable results,"
- Be based on needs demonstrated by empirical data,
- Reflect "interests, concerns, and aspirations" widely shared at Del Mar College,
- Complement Del Mar College’s "institution-wide planning and evaluation process," and
- Have the potential of influencing how our "institution organizes for success in educating students" over the long term.

Proposing a Focus Topic

The faculty, staff, students, departments, other units, and committees either individually or jointly are encouraged to suggest focus topics by Monday, March 6, 2006. Additional information on the application process is being developed which will clearly specify the requirements.

All submissions, whether anonymous or signed, will be posted to the QEP web page for review by the entire Del Mar College community. Those proposing multiple topics should submit each idea on a separate form.

For answers to questions about proposing a QEP focus topic, please email Dr. Rosie Garcia (x1205 or rgarcia@delmar.edu).
Timeline---(this timeline will continue to evolve.)

Evolving QEP Timeline:

**Spring 2006**
- SACS Planning Conference
- Name SACS Leadership Team (Linked to Summer Academy)
- Initiate Discovery Phase—exploring possible QEP Themes
- Call for Proposals – White Papers deadline 3/6/06.
- Creating of QEP Website
- Begin a series of QEP Soup- &- Substances sessions to discuss proposal ideas, questions via TLC.

**Summer 06**
- Convene smaller work groups –2-5 areas identified for development.
- Development of research level reports (mini-theses).
- Continued faculty staff development regarding QEP/SACS Reaffirmation

**Fall 06-Spring 07**
- Research presentation to college community and how it relates to each employee.
- Evolving of QEP selection with board-based involvement.
- Developing consensus of focus, research design, evaluation.
- Continued staff/faculty development (another group to annual meeting).
- Name QEP Leadership Team

**Spring 07-Spring 09**
- Beta test and fine tune QEP
- Continued faculty staff development regarding QEP/SACS Reaffirmation

**2009-2010**
- Evaluate, write, and present actual plan.
- Selection of 2 external QEP representatives
- Continued faculty staff development regarding QEP/SACS Reaffirmation
- Credentials Document to SACS due 15 months before visit—projected complete by Sept. 2009
- QEP experts identified and sent to SACS for approval (one year prior to visit).

**2010-2011**
- Report to SACS –credentials document due and visit.
- Continued faculty staff development regarding QEP/SACS Reaffirmation
- QEP plan submitted 6 weeks prior to the visit—projected complete by Jan. 2011.

**Spring 2011**
- Reaffirmation Visit.