Continuing the SACS Reaffirmation Journey: QEP

Del Mar College continues the journey toward reaffirmation, a mammoth task that requires the College to strategically plan the process.

The 2007 spring semester provided the Del Mar College community an opportunity to hear about how to successfully prepare for reaffirmation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) [http://www.sacscoc.org].

Spring 2007 Convocation

On June 8, 2007, faculty, administrators, and staff reviewed previous work as well as focused on future work to be done for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). A series of consultants spoke, lending their expertise to the process.

President Carlos Garcia gave the welcome and hosted the meeting in the newly renovated Richardson Performance Hall. This was the third in a series of campus events to address SACS reaffirmation. Ideas for the Spring 2007 Convocation were a result of Summer 2006 Academy recommendations.

As part of the introduction, Vice President of Instruction Dr. Blanca Rosa “Rosie” Garcia reviewed QEP ideas generated during discussions from the Spring 2006 Convocation (complete list in Appendix A) and shared the SACS timeline.

Suggested QEP Ideas:

- Basic Ideas/Issues that are process focused (6 ideas submitted) or focus on identifying the question (9)
- Content Areas (5-multiple in health)
- Learning Communities/First Year (7)
- Service Learning (4)
- Student Age (1)
- Success Factors (3-multiple in student support)
- Teaching Strategies that are teacher mediated (7) or that are student focused (5)
- Technology (3)

SACS Timeline:

- May 2010: Off-site review conducted
- Sept.-Nov. 2010: On-site review conducted
- Spring 2011: College notified of findings
- Summer 2011: Reviewed by Commission on Colleges at SACS
- December 2011: Final status announced at SACS Annual Conference
Faculty Participation:
During Convocation, it was emphasized that the College has positioned faculty as central to the re-affirmation process. Members of the SACS Core Committee were asked to stand to be recognized. It was also noted that Del Mar College had excellent representation at the December 2006 SACS Annual Conference in Kissimmee, FL, with 20 attendees, the most from one college.

Speakers:
All seven speakers at Convocation were experienced and noted educators and colleagues from Texas schools. Approximately 400 individuals were present to hear three speakers in the morning on QEP, and about 120 individuals were present to hear four speakers in the afternoon on faculty credentials.

Morning Session: QEP for DMC

First Speaker:
Dr. Loraine Phillips, Interim Assessment Director at Texas A&M University-College Station, focused on the Quality Enhancement Plan. The title of her presentation was “QEP 101” (slides are available on the DMC website). Dr. Phillips works closely with the implementation and assessment of the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan. She helps faculty and staff with outcome-based assessment efforts by assisting with the development of assessment plans, the identification of assessment methods, and the use of evidence for continuous improvement.

Not only did Dr. Phillips review QEP information, she also reviewed the most recent changes to the Principles of Accreditation from the 2006 annual meeting:

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the one-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 20 pages of support documentation or charts, graphs, and tables). Principles of Accreditation, 13-14.
Second Speaker:
Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, Executive Director of Quality Enhancement and First-Year Experience at West Texas A&M University, was the second morning speaker. He provided first-hand information on the QEP development process at West Texas A&M University. Dr. Lowery-Hart explained the broad-based approach taken by his university to define the important issues facing students, specifically those issues that pertain to general education requirements and first-year student initiatives. He has spearheaded several university-wide initiatives targeting curricular reform, instructional improvement, and partnership development across campus “silos.” His mission is to improve the manner in which students are academically engaged in and out of the classroom environment.

Third Speaker:
The final morning session was a panel discussion featuring Dr. Lee Sloan, Dean of Business, Professional, and Technology Education at Del Mar College, along with the two morning presenters Dr. Phillips and Dr. Lowery-Hart.

This session provided attendees the opportunity to clarify information presented and to seek additional information from the experts.

Dr. Sloan has more than 10 years experience with the SACS accreditation process. During SACS visits, he has primary responsibility for Comprehensive Standards: Faculty Credentials (3.7.1), Education Program (3.4); and supportive assistance on Institutional Effectiveness (3.3). He has also been assigned to Core Requirements: Institutional Effectiveness (2.5), Adequate Faculty (2.8), and Quality Enhancement Plan (2.12).

Developing the QEP

SACS Evaluation Criteria for QEP 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 to influence how the "institution organizes for success in educating students" over the long term.

Submission of Additional QEP Ideas:
All Convocation attendees were invited to submit their QEP ideas on a QEP survey, which was distributed with packets of information.

Benefit of QEP for DMC Students:
As the DMC mission is carried out, the QEP will be interwoven into the ongoing planning and evaluation processes to address the key question:

How can the College’s policies and practices lead to higher levels of student learning?

Afternoon Session: Faculty Credentials

Spring 2007 Convocation continued with an afternoon session welcoming a panel of four speakers on faculty credentials.

First Speakers:
The first two speakers from Austin Community College (ACC) were Cary Sowell, Head Librarian, and Dr. Lynn Beaman, Assistant Dean of Applied Technologies, Multimedia, and Public Services Division.

ACC experts Sowell and Dr. Beaman provided anecdotes about the painful experiences at their college that culminated with 220 faculty who were “let go,” and how ACC developed an improved faculty credentials process, which standardized and strengthened required documentation.

On a humorous note, the speakers outlined the “stages of grief” that they had seen in faculty during credentials discussions:
Faculty Credentials: Stages of Grief

1. **Denial** – I have been through SACS credentials before; this isn’t about me. This is only for new faculty, not me.
2. **Anger** – How can you question my/our credentials; I will sue. What do you know? I am calling someone I know at another college.
3. **Bargaining** – Make it work; I am not doing an action plan. We need to survey other colleges nationally before we do anything.
4. **Acceptance**.

The speakers stated that ACC no longer hires new faculty whose credentials require justification to SACS “by exception.” Sowell and Beaman were complimentary about the format Del Mar College is using in preparing faculty and the College for reaffirmation.

**Second Speakers:**
The second set of speakers was **Shirley Ingram**, Director of Human Resources, and **Jessica Serrata**, Human Resources Technician/Evaluator, from South Texas College (STC). They shared their experiences on faculty credentials from a human resources perspective.

From left to right: Jessica Serrata and Shirley Ingram

The STC experts suggested that Del Mar College’s hiring manual should be online to clearly articulate the required faculty credentials to any interested applicant. They further indicated that SACS recently disclosed that 88% of those institutions seeking reaffirmation had recommendations due to faculty credentials; therefore, there is no choice but to follow a low-risk, conservative approach. Technical issues for the faculty roster were also discussed and suggestions offered about how to support, present, and update the faculty roster for credentials.

All four speakers provided valuable personal experiences on faculty credentials. The afternoon Convocation activities strengthened the ongoing work of the College’s Faculty Credentials Review Committee.

Detailed bios of Convocation guest speakers are at end of this article.

**The Journey Continues...**
College dialogue will be ongoing, a requirement in meeting the SACS *Principles of Accreditation.*
Speakers’ Bios

Morning:
Dr. Loraine Phillips
• Served as Director of Program Evaluation and SACS Director of the QEP for Blinn College.
• Earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana University and a master’s degree and Doctor of Philosophy from Texas A&M University with an emphasis in literacy and higher education administration.

Dr. Lowery-Hart
• Received his B.S. in Speech from West Texas A&M University in 1991 and his M.A. in Communication Studies from Texas Tech in 1993.
• Received his Ph.D. in Gender and Diversity in Communication from Ohio University in 1996.

Dr. Lee Sloan
• Dean of a large instructional division for 12 years at Del Mar College.
• Has served as an annual SACS site team member for Initial Accreditation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation visits in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Georgia for over 10 years.
• Holds a doctorate degree from Clemson University and M.S. and B.S. degrees from North Carolina State University.

Afternoon:
Cary Sowell
• Has worked as a Librarian at Austin Community College since 1973.
• Professionally active in the American Library Association and the Texas Library Association, she contributed to the revisions of standards for the Association of College and Research Libraries Standards for Libraries in Higher Education that was published in June 2004 and included outcome measures.
• Has served on ACC committees for SACS re-accreditation efforts since 1982 as a faculty member and in 1992 as Chair of the Library Committee. Has also served as Faculty Senate President in 1996/97.
• In 2000, appointed to chair the ACC Self-Study for Re-accreditation. ACC opted to do an alternate self-study, which included documenting compliance with the 500+ “must” statements and a strategic focus component very similar to the current QEP that is required.
• For four years, attended sessions on faculty credentials at SACS conferences and currently serves on the Faculty Credentials Committee at ACC.
• Earned her B.A. degree and an M.L.S. from the University of Texas at Austin.
Dr. Lynn Beaman
• Began teaching as an adjunct instructor at Austin Community College in 1984 and in 1992 became a full-time faculty member.
• Has served as Department Chair of the Human Services Department.
• In the Fall of 2000, began to serve as the Compliance Chair of the SACS Self-Study. She continues to serve on the Faculty Credentials Committee.
• Received her B.A. degree from the University of Texas at Austin, an M.S. degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign, and her Ph.D. from Texas Woman's University.

Shirley Ingram
• Has been with STC for over 10 years. She has seen the college begin as a community college and then evolve to its current accreditation by SACS to offer baccalaureate degrees in addition to the associate's-level degrees.
• Was instrumental in the college's successful compliance with SACS standards on faculty credentialing. Along with attendance at SACS conferences for the last five years, she has also had over seven years of evaluation training with SACS consultants.
• In addition to 20 years of experience in human resources management, was a full-time art instructor with USIU-Colorado Alpine Campus. She holds a B.F.A. degree and an M.A. from the University of Denver.

Jessica Serrata
• Evaluates the degrees of faculty and staff to ensure that college faculty credentials meet SACS requirements.
• Has over 19 years of transcript evaluation experience in higher education. She currently serves on the STC committee regarding debatable faculty credentials, and she has served on numerous faculty search committees.
• Attended the World Education Services, Inc. conference regarding foreign transcripts, and she has attended evaluation training sessions with SACS consultants on numerous occasions since 1999.
• Holds an associate's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and is working on the last few hours to complete her bachelor's degree.
Appendix A
Complete List of QEP Suggestions

Note:
Spring 2006 ideas are listed in I-VIII.
Spring 2007 ideas—from Convocation to January 26, 2007—are listed in IX.

I. Basic Ideas/Issues/Concerns:
   A. Process oriented concerns (n=6)
      1. How do we involve a larger group—students, community, advisory, employers, college-wide?
      2. How do we plan for motivation and time commitment which this will require?
      3. Should we have several smaller questions vs. one large research issue?
      4. The work must include multiple measures—practical that can be applied and generalized to other areas on campus.
      5. The experimental design is important and should focus on the change in learning process. It should be greater than any one area of the campus.
      6. Would Total Quality Management broadly accepted in industry/health care be accepted in education to promote change?
   B. Identifying the question ideas/suggestions/concerns (n=9)
      1. Follow the strategic planning process using the SWAT method. Discuss it, narrow the area after self-analysis.
      2. Because of the critical nature of data, we will need to obtain it, use it. This requires wisdom.
      3. We should focus on areas where improvement is needed.
      4. The experimental design—change in learning process, not just for any one area of the College, but the design needs to have strength.
      5. The QEP is like a “giant mind” process which requires a universal scan as an assessment tool.
      6. The group should work with the Office of Institutional Research like DEC has been doing, and data sets require manipulation and analysis of data. That is what the QEP process will need/require.
      7. It was suggested that the process will need to use benchmarking data such as the Kansas CC project.
      8. We need to recruit someone doing a dissertation so that we can help them benefit or to facilitate the process.
      9. The central question is “What is it that we value as a college community?”
II. “Teaching Strategies:”
   A. Teacher mediated teaching strategies (n=7)
      1. Using enhanced learning by using an “applied content model” such as that used in the vocational/technical/health science areas.
      2. The SCANS discussion and evaluation (from workforce fields) is already in place. We could narrow and use it in other areas and, therefore, build on it for a QEP.
      3. The “Emotional Intelligence” skills, GPA areas, and concepts of leading with mind and heart have great promise for this type of research.
      4. The application of “Accelerated Learning” to a specific area of need is being discussed nationally, and we should study that as a model for improving student learning.
      5. We should take accelerated learning, the human potential, emotional intelligence, and virtual learning, and then consolidate them into one study.
      6. We should connect student learning and student confidence as improving learning outcomes.
      7. We should investigate what kinds of learning strategies are important for our type of student to improve the learning outcomes.

   B. Student focused teaching strategies (n=5)
      1. We should investigate Dependent/Independent thinkers and their effects on student success.
      2. We should focus on brain-based learning and current research such as the different ways that learning can be affected by food, Power Points, computers, etc.
      3. The potential of a Leadership component has merit such as the West Point learning theory model and the leadership development of 9 leadership competencies to develop students across the curriculum in 4 semesters. Expanding from a focus on self to class, to college, to job or community.
      4. The importance of citizenship and engagement should be studied and enlarged on.
      5. Using “parking lot observations” to determine why students leave. Many students do not “have time for learning” and can not catch up once they fall behind.

III. Content Areas:
   A. The concept of math as a key indicator without which success not as possible; perhaps focusing on learning styles research which could make a difference.
   B. The concept of writing across the curriculum, though not a new idea, as important for our community/students.
C. The concept of math across the curriculum for our students.
D. Exposing students to Humanities and trying to measure/assess the value of cultural/historical programming (exposing students to understanding and appreciating culture) on developmental students vs. the value of computerized instruction (the techno-world) for developmental students.
E. Health - Wellness continuum focus (n=5)
   1. Investigating the body weight and intelligence link.
   2. Investigating dependent versus independent learning skills, Gardner’s multiple intelligences, correlation of weight and IQ. A theme which ties health, feeling good about oneself, self-image as affecting learning outcomes for our students.
   3. Researching the wellness of faculty and how that impacts student learning.
   4. Connecting citizenship and engagement in dental hygiene students and its affect on student success and family wellness.
   5. Researching “Fitness” and participation to student success.

IV. Learning Communities and First-Year (n=7):
   A. Orientation (Student orientation as a planned “event”)
      1. Use the “Freshman Orientation;” fund it and staff it while using a research question about its effectiveness.
      2. Use the GED orientation as part of a prerequisite to a college application and enrollment sequence. Build on the success of our current GED program and fold that into a new student orientation process.
   B. Freshman Seminar (Student orientation as a “course”)
      1. Use the QEP to transform and improve the quality of first-year experience for our students.
      2. Focus on the question, “What is the purpose of Freshman Seminar?” and the assessment on what the students need assistance/help in. Those student needs should be identified. Students need referrals for success.
   C. First-Year (Student orientation as an entire year experience)
      1. Integrating Distance Learning, technology, and the first-year experience.
      2. Investigating “student engagement” and the first-year as a joint group focused on student success.
      3. Connecting the “Yes I Can” program, student identified goals, and assisting students to attain them.

V. Technology (n=3):
   A. Investigating how virtual communities can be used to integrate students and improve student learning.
   B. Using computer-based instruction for developmental areas and investigating effectiveness.
C. Improving/loosening financial aid (FA) issues for DL students. Does the level of FA impact student learning outcomes?

VI. Student Age (n=1):
Investigate whether those students who have Dual Credit courses and begin college in high schools have a higher level of success.

VII. Success Factors (n=3):
A. Investigate student transfer rates and identify what the student learning piece is for those students who transfer or do not transfer.
B. Investigate student retention rates and identify the faculty variables for those students who do not come back or who do not graduate. Are there faculty characteristics which help students succeed?
C. Review student support
   1. Can the amount of student participation promote learning?
   2. Does the amount or type of after class assistance or tutors promote student success?
   3. Focus on “Supplemental Instruction” as an important variable for student success.
   4. Investigate the type of support students needs. Many need a life boat. They have time pressures and either do not or can not access tutors.

VIII. Service Learning (n=4):
A. Investigate the feasibility of a course in freshman leadership. This course would require and introduce civic engagement, and the activity would continue in other departments or classes until they graduate.
B. We should focus on the engagement of students with non-faculty and how that promotes student success.
C. Connect “Service Learning” as a form of student engagement and a way of retaining students as a research question.
D. We should link “student engagement,” service learning, advising, degree planning, mentoring, study buddies, etc. The institution needs to reach out to students like they do in health education departments, working with them to communicate and promote success.

IX. Ideas since Spring Convocation 2007:
A. Use the work of Title V. Use “Learning Communities,” student tutoring, student mentoring, supplemental instruction and build on the DMC research already in place. Use that as a form of a pilot. That history of data has paved the way for a QEP. It has broad
applicability. We should focus it, do more investigation, and perhaps expand as warranted.¹

B. Critical thinking/problem solving as a shared central component across the curriculum at Del Mar College.

C. Student portfolios as demonstration of student learning and mastery of the Intellectual Competencies (THECB) in the core curriculum required of all AA/AS students at DMC. Student portfolios as a demonstration of student learning and mastery of program (or departmental) goals. In short, make the portfolio as a standard, college-wide tool to demonstrate student learning.²

D. Taking from QEP suggestion of transfer rates, retention, student support ideas – greater mooring of our students and integrating two points from Spelling Report (2006) regarding barrier to students in transferring and ethnic gaps of students. The proposal is to link faculty in the role of advising student majors for “front line mooring” with base-line information on financial aid, scholarship, and support services. The idea is that this type of provision would improve the chances of success for students.³

E. To investigate the development of thought through writing by a comparative review of methods used to teach writing. Again the Spelling Report was referenced.⁴

F. To examine concerns raised in the Spelling Report in view of a historical framework of changes in education focused at teaching English at DMC.⁵

G. Support for Leadership focus from student to Board.⁶

¹ Faculty member willing to coordinate the work on this QEP idea.
² Faculty member willing to work on a white paper on this QEP idea.
³ Faculty member interested in working on white paper for this idea.
⁴ Faculty member is interested in working on white paper for this idea.
⁵ Faculty member is interested in working on white paper for this idea.
⁶ Faculty member is interested in working on white paper for this idea.