

May 2006 SACS Update

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires institutional reaffirmation every ten years. For two years, UNT has been preparing for the 2006 affirmation on-site review team visit and the ensuing decision regarding our reaffirmation.

In previous review cycles, SACS focused primarily on a checklist of compliance issues. Now, the focus is more pro-active. It requires that universities engage in a process of continuous improvement. Part of that requirement is the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan. Our plan revolves around our commitment to “make big classes better.” You can read about our Quality Enhancement Plan (the UNT QEP) at www.unt.edu/QEP.

A second part of the focus on continuous improvement looks at the ongoing cycle of planning-implementation-assessment-change. It asks us to set goals for ourselves in all areas of university life — from what students learn in our degree programs to how we build community. Once we set the goals we measure our success and make any appropriate changes to keep us moving toward our goals.

SACS has 12 core requirements (with 3 sub-requirements) plus 61 comprehensive standards that each university must address.

What have we been doing?

- During late 2004 through spring 2005, faculty and administrators were busy inputting program data regarding institutional effectiveness.
- In September 2005 we submitted our compliance report to SACS for review by an off-site team.
- In November 2005 the off-site team reviewed our compliance report.
- In December 2005 we received the initial report from the off-site team’s examination of our compliance report. At that time they identified areas where further evidence of compliance was needed.
- In February 2006 we submitted a “focused report” (focused on those areas where further information was needed) and our QEP.
(A QEP is a new SACS requirement. Each institution must plan, document, and put into place a Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on a targeted strategy for improving student learning. **What is UNT’s QEP?** UNT chose a theme of improving large enrollment classes/“making big classes better” as our QEP, in order to improve student learning and retention in our classes with 150+ students. This area of focus was selected because our student success rate in classes with 150+ students is only about 70-80 percent, and while that is in line with other universities it certainly can be improved.)
- In April 2006 the on-site SACS team was on campus for three days to examine our documents, interview our employees and search for evidences of what we reported in our compliance report.

- We are now awaiting the on-site team's report.
- At its May 2006 meeting the UNT System Board of Regents approved our Strategic Plan. This was an important component for moving forward with our SACS reaffirmation.
- In September 2006 we will submit a response report to address any requests for further information or documentation made from the on-site team.
- A committee within SACS will review our response report and make a recommendation regarding reaffirmation of accreditation.
- SACS will announce its decisions for all universities currently under review for reaffirmation at its December 2006 meeting.

Of course, this will not be the end of the process. UNT's participation in SACS and its commitment to its QEP and to continuing improvement are ongoing.