

SACSFACTS

An Overview of Accreditation and the Reaffirmation Process

What is the purpose and process of accreditation?

Accreditation in the United States is a voluntary and self-regulatory mechanism of the higher education community. It plays a significant role in fostering public confidence in the educational enterprise, in maintaining standards, in enhancing institutional effectiveness, and in improving higher education. It also provides the basis on which community colleges and universities can be assured that accredited institutions have complied with a common set of requirements and standards.

What changes have occurred in the manner in which the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) approaches accreditation?

The adoption of the *2001 Principles of Accreditation* by the Commission on Colleges introduced significant changes in SACS' approach to accreditation. The institution's effectiveness and its ability to create and sustain an environment that enhances student learning is the focus of this new approach.

What are the four paramount concepts on which the success of the accreditation process depends?

There are four paramount concepts on which the success of the accreditation process depends. One is the belief that the accreditation of institutions should be conducted by peer reviewers, a process whereby institutional effectiveness and quality are professionally judged by peers from institutions of higher education whose expertise and experience are essential to their ability to exercise professional judgment. A second concept is institutional integrity and the assumption that all information disseminated by an institution seeking accreditation is truthful, accurate, and complete and that all of its dealings with its constituencies and the public are honest and forthright. A third concept is the institution's commitment to quality enhancement and continuous improvement. The last paramount concept is the institution's focus on student learning and its effectiveness in supporting and enhancing student learning.

What are the benefits of the internal institutional analysis?

An institution can derive numerous benefits from its internal assessment and determination of the extent of its compliance with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards contained in SACS' *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. Among these benefits are the institution's opportunities to:

1. Examine its mission statement to determine whether it accurately reflects its values, aspirations, and commitments to constituent groups.
2. Review its goals, programs, and services to determine the extent to which they reflect its mission.
3. Use the analysis of its compliance with SACS' Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs, operations, and services.
4. Strive for a level of performance that will challenge it to move beyond the status quo or beyond simply accepting a level of performances that, in its judgment, constitutes compliance with the accreditation requirements and standards.
5. Build or enhance its database as an ongoing documentation of its continuous improvement as well as evidence of its compliance with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards.
6. Reinforce the concept of accreditation as an ongoing rather than an episodic event.
7. Develop a Quality Enhancement Plan that will deal with an issue or issues that are important to its entire community and that demonstrates promise of making a significant impact on the quality of student learning.

8. Strengthen the sense of involvement of all members of its community in enhancing institutional quality and effectiveness.
9. Demonstrate its accountability to constituents and to the public.

What documents must Pasco- Hernando Community College produce as part of the SACS reaffirmation of accreditation process?

The College will need to produce several documents that are key elements of the reaffirmation process. They are:

1. **Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement.** *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* is the primary source document describing the accreditation standards and process. Participants in the review process should consult it throughout the accreditation process. It contains the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards with which institutions must comply in order to be granted reaffirmation. The *Principles of Accreditation* contains four sections:

- a. Section 1...Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation
- b. Section 2...Core Requirements
- c. Section 3...Comprehensive Standards
- d. Section 4...Federal Regulations for Title IV Funding

The *Principles of Accreditation* state that “compliance with the Core Requirements is essential for gaining and maintaining accreditation with the Commission on Colleges.” Compliance with the Core Requirements is necessary but not sufficient to warrant reaffirmation of accreditation. In addition to the Core Requirements, the College must also demonstrate the necessary level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions based criteria associated with its mission, governance, effectiveness, programs and resources.

2. The **Compliance Certification** is the document that will be produced by the College in attesting to its determination of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards. The College must also document that it is in compliance with the federal government regulations for Title IV funding. Title IV funds are federal funds that the College awards to students in the form of financial aid.

3. The College must develop a **Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)**. The QEP is a document developed by the College that describes a course of action for institutional improvement crucial to enhancing educational quality that is directly related to student learning.

What is the proposed timeframe that the College will follow as part of the SACS reaffirmation of accreditation process?

The following master calendar lists dates and locations of key activities that are associated with the College’s SACS reaffirmation of accreditation process.

Key Activities	Dates	Location
Mock Compliance Report	April 30, 2007	New Port Richey
SACS Orientation of College’s Accreditation Leadership Team	January 28, 2008	Atlanta
Compliance Certification Due to SACS	March 15, 2009	Atlanta
SACS Off-Site Review of Compliance Certification	May 18-22, 2009	Atlanta
Focused Report Due to SACS	July 16, 2009	Atlanta
Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Due to SACS	July 16, 2009	Atlanta
SACS On-Site Review of QEP and Unresolved Issues of Compliance Certification	September 1, 2009	New Port Richey
Reaffirmation Decision by SACS Commission on Colleges	June, 2010	Atlanta

Upcoming information....

In the next edition of **SACS FACTS**, you will learn about the status of the College’s mock compliance report. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need clarification regarding the information contained in **SACS FACTS**, please contact Dr. Burt Harres at extension 3490 or Dr. Randy Stovall at extension 1301.

