

Faculty Senate Meeting - 9 September 2008

## Accreditations and Assessment

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### SACS Reaffirmation – 2013 (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sacs/>)

The accrediting standards used by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Commission on Colleges are contained in the 2008 Handbook, Principles of Accreditation. This document provides consistent guidelines for peer review, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education.

Approximately six months prior to our scheduled reaffirmation visit (March 2013), ECU will submit a Compliance Certification document that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Regulations as presented in the Principles. The Compliance Certification document is reviewed by an off-site review committee which advises the on-site review committee by making observations about the information the institution provides and by determining the institution's compliance with standards.

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation. Each institution applying for accreditation or renewal of accreditation is required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length.

**The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning. This university-wide planning process will begin in January 2010.**

At the culmination of the QEP, the Commission on Colleges sends an on-site committee of professional peers to the campus (March 2013 in the case of ECU) to assess the educational strengths and weaknesses of the institution. The written report of the committee helps the institution improve its programs, refine its QEP, and also provides the basis on which the Commission decides to grant, continue, reaffirm, or withdraw accreditation.

During a typical three-day visit, committee members examine data and conduct interviews in order to evaluate the soundness of the QEP and ascertain whether the institution is in compliance with the Principles. The committee offers written advice to the institution, develops a consensus on its findings, and completes a draft report. Finally, the committee presents an oral summary in an exit report to the chief executive officer and invited institutional officials on the last day of the visit.

The departure of the committee from campus does not mark the end of the accreditation process. The visiting committee report and the response of the institution to the findings of the committee are reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports, a standing committee of the Commission. The Committee on Compliance and Reports recommends action on accreditation to the Executive Council of the Commission. The Executive Council in turn recommends action to the Commission on Colleges, which makes the final decision. These decisions are announced to the College Delegate Assembly during its annual business session in December 2013.



## Academic Program Assessment

In assuring a high quality education for our students, ECU is looking purposefully toward developing a culture of evidence. Such a culture provides an evidence-based framework for improving, revising, and introducing comprehensive systems for the collection, dissemination, and utilization of information on meaningful student learning outcomes. Such information can be used to develop new pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve learning. Embracing such a culture of innovation and quality improvement has been specifically called for in the report of the National Commission on Higher Education, otherwise known as the Spellings Commission.

The developing ECU Office of Accreditations and Assessment (OAA) is dedicated to a concept of quality enhancement. The office will move the university in achieving continuous improvement by re-vitalizing engagement of faculty in a sound and meaningful process of outcome assessment. Although evaluation of an institution's educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, we are expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all our programs and services. Academic units will implement the outcomes assessment procedures (briefly) detailed below in accord with the process and stated timeline as provided to deans by the Provost's office on 3 September 2008.

Assessment is a formative process. The Office of Accreditations and Assessment plans to provide feedback to each academic unit on its outcomes assessment activities according to a pre-defined rubric. The Outcomes Assessment and Program Review Council established in preparation for our regional accreditation in 2013 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) will assist in report evaluation. The major objective is to provide meaningful, consistent, and objective information to academic programs and faculty in order to grow a culture of assessment and foster institution-wide improvement in institutional effectiveness. A secondary but important objective is to model portfolio assessment that can be used by academic departments to measure their own programs' effectiveness. Model outcome assessment reports will be identified and shared.

Brief overview of the proposed Academic Program Assessment Reporting 2008-2009

### Unit of Analysis

All academic programs should develop an outcomes assessment report for each distinct academic program. Bachelor's, masters and doctoral degrees in the same field represent three distinct programs. If there are two degrees at the same level in the same area but with only slight distinctions, these may be combined at the faculty's discretion. Examples are: 1) a B.A. and a B.S. degree in the same field in which the difference between required curricula resides in only one or two courses; 2) two masters' degrees in the same area that differ only by requiring a thesis in one case and an independent project in the other. Programs with both face-to-face and distance education sections of the same course should employ the same learning objectives and assessment instruments in order to demonstrate comparable outcomes.

### Required Components

Each program should provide thorough information in these five areas:

1. Program Description
2. Outcomes
3. Assessment
4. Assessment Results
5. Improvement Actions



## Performance Management Solution (PMS)

ECU is critically evaluating the purchase of a web-based enterprise solution that provides the essential framework for institutional assessment, strategic planning, accreditation, and quality improvement processes from the student to university level. Such a system offers a complete process application for managing continuous improvement throughout academic and non-academic areas of our institution. The higher education literature supports that web-based assessment enables broad-based participation which in turn maximizes results and helps sustain and grow a culture of assessment and a culture of evidence.

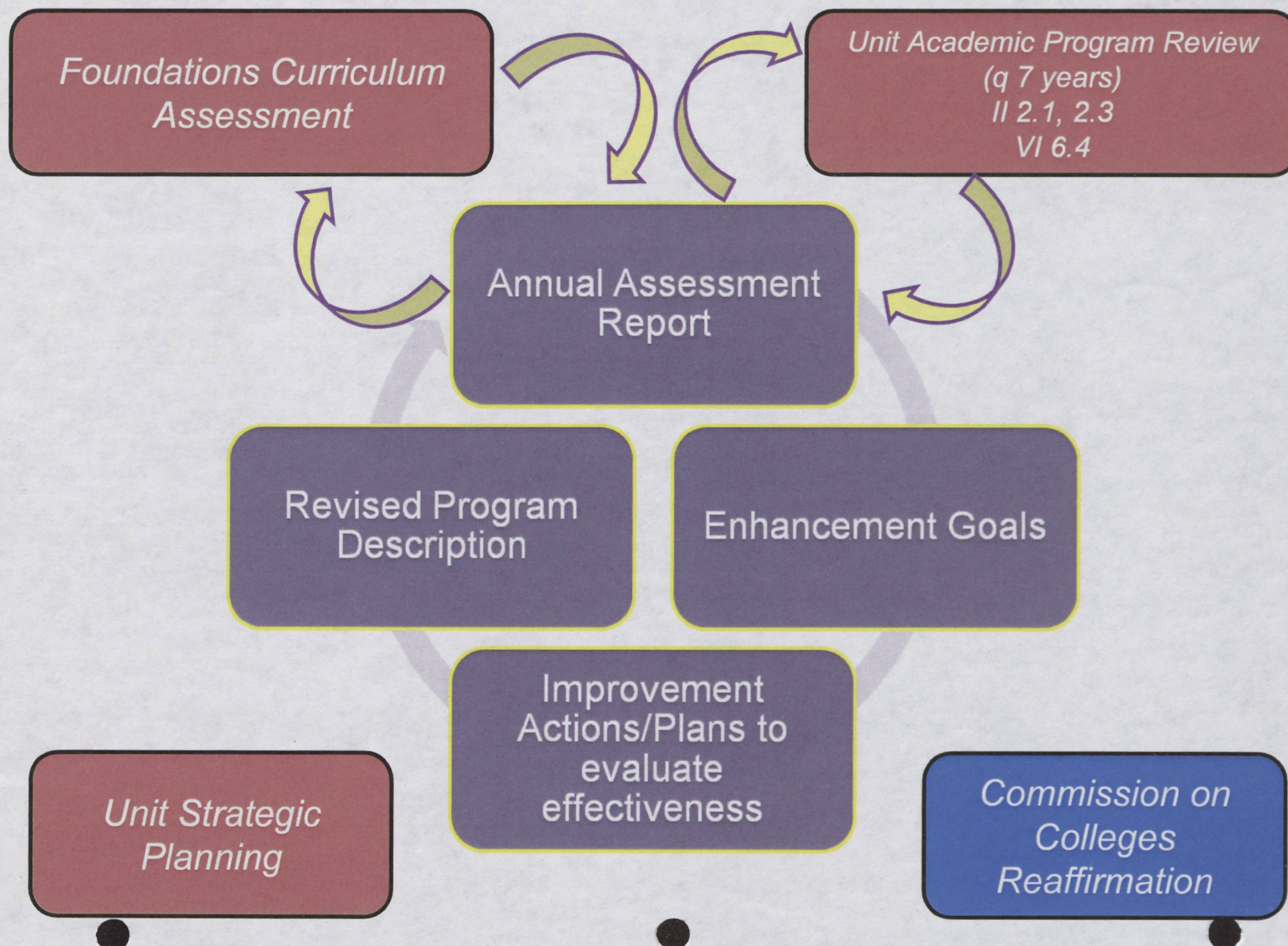
- Outcomes Assessment – The PMS enables us to increase the understanding of and commitment to ongoing planning and evaluation from the level of individual programs up through the entire university.
- Integrated Strategic Planning – The PMS will assist us in closing the loop between planning and action, a connection that is traditionally difficult to complete and measure in higher education institutions. Such a system helps to provide a structure and process definition to strategic planning initiatives.
- Organizational alignment – Is it possible to demonstrate how outcomes support the mission? How do program or department objectives support school/college/division goals? Which courses or activities support departmental activities? Which aspects of the campus support specific components of the mission? The PMS assists in driving institution-wide alignment because the system provides complete visibility into how each area of the institution contributes to meeting goals and objectives.
- Accreditation – Assessment plans with outcomes and their measures defined can be easily viewed. More importantly, observations including findings, results, and conclusions are linked to strategies or action plans undertaken to improve programs and learning (feedback loop).
- Performance Management – The solution facilitates more efficient organizational management as it assists with translating data into coordinated goal-driven action. The program accepts data from any source and features a complete feedback loop built into the solution which focuses on the strategic issue of what the institution actually does with the information.

The three systems (all of which interface with Banner) being closely evaluated and piloted on campus by faculty are:

- LiveText
- Nuventive TracDat
- Task Stream



## East Carolina University Assessment Program – A Shared Responsibility





# Leadership Teams, Councils, and Working Groups

East Carolina University Reaffirmation  
Southern Association of College and Schools  
Commission on Colleges

