



# Center for Teaching Excellence Hampton University Teaching Matters

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## SACS, Assessment and Accountability

by  
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Many of you have often wondered what measuring student outcomes and other objectives mean to the health of the overall university. Why should you develop steps leading from the course to determining what students should know and be able to do at each level of their matriculation? Why develop departmental and program objectives linking with the institutional Strategic Plan that assess where we are and where we should go? Many departments with outside accrediting agencies already know the answers to these questions, but even they often wonder why the systems could not be more similar, thereby reducing some of the work. Recently, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) provided even more evidence of the legitimacy of our efforts in answering these questions. Our efforts in seeking accountability were important to a very successful visit by a team of our peers from SACS and will aid immensely in future plans to move our university to new goals for 2020.

There were many outstanding steps in our recent past that place us where we are today. First, was our vision in establishing the Integrated Strategic Planning Process that allowed us to review our objectives and our progress toward achieving these objectives on an annual basis. Embedded within this process was the ability to reflect on our progress and establish new goals and/or objectives based on current information. This process went beyond the academic units and included every support area on campus. On the academic side, a Program Review process was established to evaluate the educational programs and to identify strengths and challenges. During Fall of 2004, we went further and addressed essential student competencies at each level for our majors and established competencies for the general education core as well. Our final step was the establishment of specific intended learner outcomes for each major, helping us to identify what our students should know and be able to do upon graduation. Each one of these steps is linked to one another and provides us with information to make future decisions.

Additionally, each of these steps is linked to several key SACS Comprehensive Standards. Of particular note is Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1, which states "The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs (*including student learning outcomes for educational programs*) and its administrative and educational support services, assesses whether it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement

based on analysis of these results. (Institutional Effectiveness)" This standard has routinely received many recommendations for colleges and universities during their SACS visits. Our Integrated Strategic Planning process was outlined in the Compliance Certification document, but it was not clearly understood by the Off-Site Review Committee. We had the opportunity to further detail the process in a follow-up report and during the On-Site visit. These further explanations reduced 29 initial recommendations to only two recommendations cited during the exit conference with the On-Site Review team. Clarifying our processes allowed the visiting team to understand what we already knew - we are well on our way to establishing an outcomes-based assessment and accountability system.

In order to achieve this goal, many individuals worked hard to establish the process and worked even harder to breathe life into the process. We would not be where we are today without each member of our Hampton University family, but our work is not complete! We still must look at each course taught and ensure that specific intended learner outcomes are established. We must continue our work on establishing departmental and program specific learner outcomes in order to determine what our majors should know and be able to do upon graduation. We must continue moving forward in establishing program goals and objectives to meet the Strategic Planning process for 2020.

Each of you deserves heart-felt thanks for your prior efforts and additional encouragement for the work ahead. Your efforts have again reaffirmed the tradition of excellence at "*Our Home By the Sea*," Hampton University.

## Announcements

The Grant Institute: Certificate in Professional Program Development and Grant Communication will be held in Washington, DC, May 19 - 23, 2008. Interested development professionals, researchers, faculty, and graduate students should register as soon as possible, as demand means that seats will fill up quickly. All participants will receive certification in professional grant writing from the Institute, as well as 3.5 CEU units. **For more information call (888) 824 - 4424 or visit The Grant Institute at [www.thegrantinstitute.com](http://www.thegrantinstitute.com).**

The AAC&U's fall Network for Academic Renewal Meeting (Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence: Accelerating and Assessing Progress), is scheduled for October 16-18, 2008, in Long Beach, California, and Engaging Science, Advancing Learning: General Education, Majors, and the New Global Century, will be held November 6-8, 2008, in Providence, Rhode Island. Join the AAC & U contact list to be notified when early registration opens. AAC&U is also announcing that its 2009 Annual Meeting will be held January 21-24, 2009, at the Seattle Sheraton Hotel in Seattle, Washington. A preconference symposium will focus on issues of sustainability. More details about the meeting will be available in June on the website. **For more information, visit the AAC&U at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).**