

# Still Striving

The Role of Faculty and Staff  
in the SACS Accreditation Process



[www.southerneducation.org](http://www.southerneducation.org)

## The Southern Education Foundation

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF), [www.southerneducation.org](http://www.southerneducation.org), is a non-profit organization comprised of diverse women and men who work together to improve the quality of life for all of the South's people through better and more accessible education. SEF advances creative solutions to ensure fairness and excellence in education for low-income students from pre-school through higher education.

SEF depends upon contributions from foundations, corporations and individuals to support its efforts. SEF develops and implements programs of its own design, serves as an intermediary for donors who want a high-quality partner with which to work on education issues in the South, and participates as a public charity in the world of philanthropy.

### **SEF's Vision**

We seek a South and a nation with a skilled workforce that sustains an expanding economy, where civic life embodies diversity and democratic values and practice, and where an excellent education system provides all students with fair chances to develop their talents and contribute to the common good. We will be known for our commitment to combating poverty and inequality through education.

### **SEF's Timeless Mission**

SEF develops, promotes and implements policies, practices and creative solutions that ensure educational excellence, fairness, and high levels of achievement among African Americans and other groups and communities that have not yet reached the full measure of their potential.

### **SEF's Values and Principles**

SEF is committed to:

- top quality work, assessment and continuous improvement to achieve high impact
- collaborative efforts that draw on the best of diverse institutions and communities in support of educational excellence
- creative problem solving
- integrity, accountability and transparency
- adaptability, flexibility and future-oriented approaches, and
- honest and intelligent advocacy to achieve results

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## Foreword

It has been the great privilege of the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) to work for many years to help low income students and communities in the South improve their life chances through access to more and better quality education opportunity at all levels, from pre-school through higher education. From its inception as the Peabody Fund in 1867, the institution known today as SEF has affirmed that all people, irrespective of color, geography, or wealth, deserve a fair chance to better their life circumstances and contribute to the common good. The advent of globalization and of market forces that now render competition for resources, goods, and services more fierce than ever only reinforces the importance of quality education for attainment of national goals, economic growth, prosperity, innovation, and strong democratic institutions.

SEF has long understood that multifaceted support of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is part of the solution to the South's long legacy of devaluation, exploitation, segregation, and subordination of African Americans. SEF has supported such institutions because they have been in the past and continue to be in the present pathways out of poverty for millions of low income students. HBCUs also serve as outlets for the intellectual gifts of those who train young minds and are supported by talented staff who manage, administer, and maintain facilities while attending to the "business" of higher education.

HBCU faculty members and staff are the beating hearts of their institutions. Thus, it should surprise no one to learn that accrediting agencies, charged with the responsibility of ensuring institutional effectiveness and quality student learning outcomes and services as a precondition to federal financial aid eligibility, focus great attention on the work and functioning of staff and faculty at all institutions subject to review. For this reason, this publication—one of SEF's *Still Striving* series written expressly for HBCU leaders to demystify and advance understanding of accreditation processes—focuses on the role and responsibility of faculty and staff in the accreditation process.

If faculty members and staff are to help their institutions achieve and maintain educational, managerial, and administrative excellence, they must understand accreditation processes. More than that, they must find effective ways of communicating how what they do conforms to best practices and accreditation requirements. They must demonstrate with data their continuous commitment to critical assessment of the work they do, their willingness to use data to improve practice, their openness to engaging all members of the institutional community in pursuit of excellence, and their constant attention to the impact of what they do on the capacity of students to experience optimal learning. If taxpayers, through the federal government, are to authorize the allocation of monies for higher education, they need and increasingly demand evidence of the "return" on their investment.

## The Role of Faculty and Staff in the SACS Accreditation Process

In this monograph, Dr. Leroy Davis, a distinguished educator and former HBCU president, describes the role of faculty and staff in the accreditation processes of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which has oversight of some 77 HBCUs. Since 2003, SEF has helped HBCUs prepare for SACS' review through (a) selected convenings on topics such as measures of fiscal stability, student learning outcomes assessment and documentation, institutional effectiveness research, the role of accreditation liaisons, and governance and accreditation; (b) small grants to facilitate review preparation; (c) publications on selected topics; and (d) provision of travel study awards. These and other efforts have reduced the rate at which HBCUs have been sanctioned for noncompliance by SACS and have helped to create a supportive learning community, akin to a consortium, of HBCU leaders. Dr. Davis, an acknowledged expert on accreditation issues, has assisted SEF in all of these efforts.

None of this work would have been possible without the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations. SEF extends thanks to them for affording SEF the opportunity to serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Huntley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lynn" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Huntley".

Lynn Huntley

President

The Southern Education Foundation

June 2009



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### Introduction

Securing and maintaining accreditation is essential for the existence or sustainability of most institutions of higher education, especially resource-challenged Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Agencies that conduct accreditation reviews are selected by the federal government for that purpose and promulgate requirements that covered institutions must meet to be "reaffirmed." If an institution fails to adhere to such guidelines, it may be sanctioned and ultimately lose its accredited status.

Accreditation validates institutional quality and, in most cases, guarantees eligibility for federal student financial aid programs (Council for Higher Education Accreditation 2002). Quality student learning outcomes are the end to be achieved and the purpose for which federal student financial aid is provided.

As will be seen more fully in the discussion that follows, the interrelated components that constitute an institution of higher education—from top to bottom—are all considered in the accreditation review process. This means that the work and contributions of every person who works at an HBCU, provides services to it, or discharges governance responsibilities are subject to review and oversight. Thus every faculty and staff member needs to understand what accreditation processes seek to achieve, benchmarks of best practice, and the philosophy of planning and the commitment to continuous improvement lying at the core of accreditation standards.

This monograph is written for the 77 HBCUs subject to oversight by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a regional accrediting body designated by the US Department of Education to manage accreditation processes. Comprised of and governed by member institutions, SACS provides a wide and rich array of resources describing the policies and procedures governing member institutions, the requirements (*Standards or Principles*) for membership, and the processes used to reaffirm institutional accreditation.

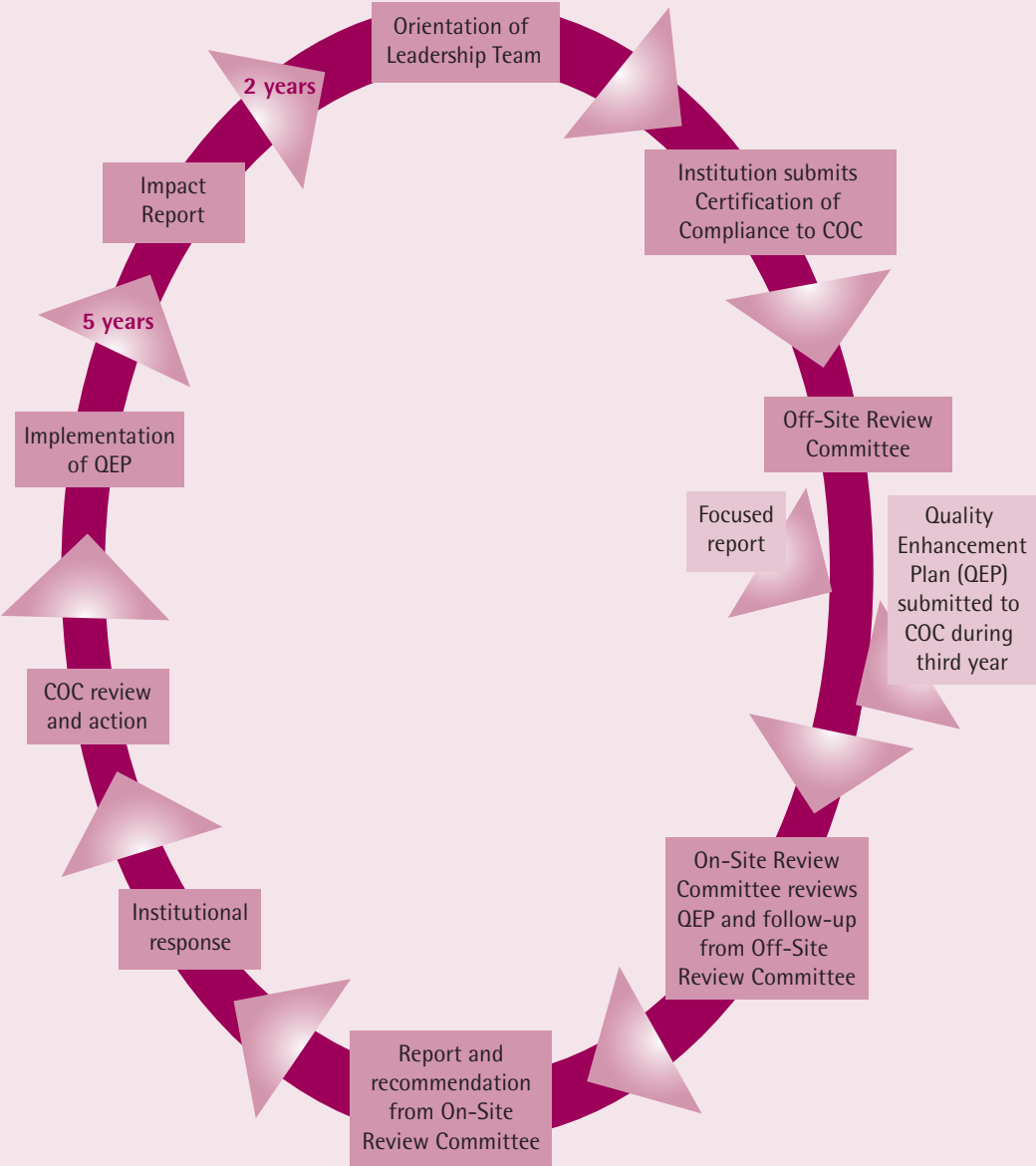
In SACS' publications, considerable attention is devoted to those who have major leadership roles in accreditation or reaccreditation of higher education institutions, i.e., presidents or chancellors, committee chairs, trustees, accreditation liaisons, etc. Less detail is provided in relation to the roles, duties, and responsibilities of institutional faculty and staff members who are responsible for the finer details of the accreditation process. Yet it is in a real sense upon their shoulders that student learning outcomes and quality education, research, and pedagogy—the *raison d'être* of institutions of higher education—rest.

This paper focuses on faculty, staff, and the accreditation process. It is written to encourage HBCU faculty and staff to embrace their roles in relation to accreditation and better understand SACS' requirements and points of emphasis.

### Understanding the SACS Accreditation Process

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), one of the six regional accrediting associations in the United States, is comprised primarily of institutions in the Southern region. The higher education component of SACS is the Commission on Colleges (COC). Commission members approve institutional standards of quality, as well as policies and procedures with which members must demonstrate compliance. In addition to establishing their own rules and regulations, SACS and other regional accrediting bodies are also required by the US Department of Education to ensure that their member institutions comply with several federally mandated standards.

### The SACS Reaffirmation of Accreditation Process



## The Role of Faculty and Staff in the SACS Accreditation Process

As mentioned earlier, the COC publishes several handbooks and resource manuals of its membership standards (principles), philosophy of accreditation, and operating policies and procedures (Commission on Colleges 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2008). Most of these resources are also online. These documents help the COC fulfill a major component of its mission, which is "the improvement of the effectiveness of institutions by insuring that they meet standards established by the higher education community that address the needs of society and students" (Commission on Colleges 2008).

The current accreditation standards for the COC are described in *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. These principles were approved by the COC membership in 2002 and revised in 2006 and 2007. Revisions are generally made in response to membership concerns or to external forces such as the federal government. While most changes represent clarifications or modifications of existing standards, some are actually new requirements. Therefore, in this paper, we will refer to the most recent edition of the *Principles* (2008), as well as other COC documents.

Every ten years, member institutions are required to demonstrate their compliance with current accreditation standards or principles. The figure on the previous page provides an overview of the reaffirmation activities and requirements expected of institutions during this decennial cycle. Unaccredited institutions seeking membership within SACS must also demonstrate compliance with these requirements as a pre-condition for membership. Those member institutions whose reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled after 2004 are required to comply with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

The concept of "quality enhancement" is at the heart of the SACS philosophy. This concept assumes that each institution should be engaged in a continuous program of improvement and be able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission (Commission on Colleges 2004). The institution is also expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all its programs and services. Simply stated, the COC expects its member institutions to be "dedicated to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their resources and capabilities to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occurs, as appropriate to the mission" (Commission on Colleges 2004). In alignment with this philosophy, the COC reaffirmation of accreditation process has two major components that member institutions must complete: Certification of Compliance and a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

### Certification of Compliance

Certification of Compliance requires the institution to demonstrate the extent of its compliance with the COC Standards (Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements). This self-assessment is completed by the institution approximately fifteen months before the scheduled reaffirmation review.

Preparing this comprehensive report requires leadership at the highest levels of the institution. Both faculty and staff perform pivotal roles in ensuring that the institution adequately demonstrates its degree of compliance. These vital faculty/staff roles are described *infra*. The final Certification of Compliance document requires the signatures of the institution's chief executive officer and the accreditation liaison (Commission on Colleges 2004). These signatures attest to the institution's integrity and certify that the process has been thorough, honest, and forthright, and that the information is truthful, accurate, and complete (Commission on Colleges 2004).

Once submitted to the Commission, this document is reviewed by an Off-Site Review Committee. This committee of peers determines if the institution's compliance declarations on each of the standards are accurate and supported by the appropriate evidence or documentation. A report of findings is prepared by the committee for the COC and the institution. The institution may prepare a response to the findings. However, any unresolved issues are forwarded to the On-Site Review Committee for assessment.

Volunteer service on peer review committees (off-site and on-site) provides opportunities for faculty and staff to be engaged in the accreditation process. However, it should be noted that peer reviewers cannot evaluate their own compliance certification reports or those of colleagues in their home state.

## The Quality Enhancement Plan

The second major component of the accreditation process is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP is submitted to the COC by the institution four to six weeks prior to the visit of the On-Site Review Committee. The purpose of the QEP document is to demonstrate the commitment and engagement of the institution in addressing one or more issues that affect student learning and institutional quality.

The guidelines for developing a QEP are very specific. First, the plan should focus on learning outcomes or support for the learning environment. Second, the process for identifying institutional issues or potential QEP topics should be broad-based and involve a cross section of stakeholders. Third, the institution must demonstrate the capacity to implement the plan, and fourth, the plan should contain specific goals and strategies for assessing their achievement. It is also required that the plan be succinct, containing no more than one hundred pages.

Developing a QEP presents an opportunity for the institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness. It provides a variety of avenues for both faculty and staff participation in the development of this important institutional planning document. In effect, the QEP is a forward-looking instrument that commits the institution to a future course of action. Its ultimate goal is to improve learning experiences for students.

Because the QEP is an institutional document, it is necessary to have broad-based institutional participation in the identification of a QEP topic. Minimally, this includes faculty, staff, and students. Governing board, alumni, and community participation may also be appropriate, depending on the mission of the institution.

The COC does not prescribe a specific process for selecting a QEP topic. However, the institution's Leadership Team, the body spearheading reaffirmation review preparation, is expected to provide general oversight of the process. Most institutions encourage their constituencies to participate in the selection process through a series of town hall style meetings, school/departmental meetings, focus groups, and other gatherings of students, faculty, and staff. Each institution has its own style and format for achieving broad participation in the topic selection process. In some instances, the Leadership Team may appoint a committee of faculty, staff, and students to develop and implement a strategy for achieving institutional participation.

While it is important to have all campus groups coalesce around a specific QEP topic, it is especially important to have faculty investment and shared ownership. Faculty are the experts in student learning, pedagogy, and research; they play an essential role in all aspects of the QEP. Indeed, it is not uncommon to have the faculty take a formal vote on the selection of a QEP topic.

## The Role of Faculty and Staff in the SACS Accreditation Process

Support staff members are likewise important voices in the selection process. Given their administrative expertise, they are able to make considerable contributions to the discussion of institutional issues under consideration as potential QEP topics. Institutional researchers represent an additional group of staff members able to provide relevant institutional data to help frame discussions throughout the selection process.

The selection of the QEP topic, if done correctly, is a highly collaborative activity involving faculty, staff, students, and others. In fact, no part of the reaffirmation process depends more on broad participation than the selection of the QEP topic.

Once the topic is selected, the next phase of the QEP development process is researching and writing the actual QEP document. As discussed earlier, the COC is very prescriptive about the content, format, length, style, and other features of the QEP document. Some institutions choose to appoint a QEP writing or development committee composed of faculty and staff to complete this crucial phase of the process, while other institutions may select one or two individuals to draft the QEP.

After the institution completes the reaffirmation process and its QEP is approved by the COC, the implementation phase begins. While each QEP is unique, they all seek to improve institutional quality and enhance student learning. At the end of the fifth year following successful reaffirmation, the institution is required to submit to the COC an impact report that describes outcomes resulting from the implementation of the QEP. Therefore, the QEP, as presented in the *Principles*, expands reaffirmation from a single culminating event into a process of continuous institutional engagement.

### Student Learning Outcomes

Institutions accredited by the COC are required to make an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement. Regardless of an institution's mission, student learning should be the central focus of its work. The *Principles of Accreditation* require institutions to demonstrate that they have adequate resources and effective programs and services that result in student learning. Specifically, *Principles* Core Requirement 2.4 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3 (Institutional Effectiveness) place major emphasis on student learning outcomes. In a broader sense, the QEP is similarly focused on student learning.

At a minimum, institutions are expected to establish clear, measurable educational goals or outcomes for their students. The achievement of these goals should be evaluated regularly using multiple assessment strategies. Ultimately, program changes and improvements should be made based on the results of these assessments.

What is student learning and how do we assess it? Learning is a complex process that entails not only what students know but what they do with that knowledge. It involves not only information and abilities but also values, attitude, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom (Astin, Banta, et al. 1996). Higher education employs an array of tools and instruments to assess various aspects of student learning, including the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), and the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBASE), to name a few. Since student learning includes curricular, co-curricular, and out-of-class educational experiences, other non-standardized examination measures (capstone courses, portfolios, recitals, senior theses, etc.) are also utilized in assessment.

The measurement of student learning has been for decades a center of focus within and outside of the higher education community. Currently, institutions of higher learning face increasing pressure to measure student learning directly and to employ standardized testing similar to the K-12 program "No Child Left Behind." As an example, the US Department of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education has recommended the use of standardized tests on critical thinking, problem-solving, and communications for all college students (US Department of Education 2007). Many people in the higher education community are opposed to this "cookie-cutter" approach because of the complex nature of learning and the need to employ multiple methods to assess student learning.

More recently, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the Teagle Foundation have adopted a Statement of Principles on student learning and accountability that advocates a broader approach to assessing student learning outcomes and encourages the higher education community to accept greater responsibility for the educational outcomes of students (Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation 2008).

Finally, student learning is a responsibility that involves people from across the educational community. Establishing educational goals for students is clearly the domain of the faculty, but student learning assessment questions cannot be fully addressed without participation by student affairs educators, librarians, institutional researchers, administrators, and students themselves. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni, employers, trustees, etc.) whose experiences can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for student learning. Therefore, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts, but a collaborative activity; its aim is a wider, better informed approach to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

Having made these points, it is worth repeating that faculty members and leaders at all levels have first and foremost the duty to know their fields of expertise; to keep abreast of developments; to understand effective pedagogy; to think together about what it is they as individual instructors, as departments, and as an institution want their students to learn; and to devise sturdy but flexible assessment and documentation outcomes. While student learning requirements are broadly defined, subject matter mastery, development of critical analytic skills, and guidance are still primary domains of institutional faculty. A culture of communication and collaboration—of collective searching for the best and most effective ways of helping students develop essential knowledge-based skills—is necessary to optimize learning outcomes.

## Faculty and Staff Roles

The COC has established highly specific and straightforward guidelines for submitting reports and completing other reaffirmation activities. Once the president and Leadership Team have a broad understanding of this process, selecting and appointing the right people to serve in designated roles constitutes the next phase of the reaffirmation planning process.

The reaffirmation of accreditation process is comprehensive and requires the engagement of persons throughout the institution. Some roles are more appropriate for faculty, while others should be performed by staff. What is most important, however, is that everyone understand the value of accreditation and be willing to serve in some capacity. Successful reaffirmation of accreditation is more of an institutional team effort and less of a series of individual performances. The roles of the president or chancellor and board members have been described in detail (Davis 2007a, 2007b). Below we identify some of the key roles played by faculty and staff to complete the important work of reaffirmation.

### **The Leadership Team**

The establishment of an institutional Leadership Team is a COC requirement. This team has the major responsibility of ensuring that the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and Certification of Compliance process are managed properly and that all other aspects of the reaffirmation process are on time and on task. In general, this team steers the course of the reaffirmation process from beginning to end. If the Leadership Team is not strategically appointed (by the CEO) or if it does not fully understand its oversight role, a successful reaffirmation outcome may be in jeopardy.

The COC expects the Leadership Team to be a small, nimble working group consisting, minimally, of the chief executive officer, the accreditation liaison, the chief academic affairs officer, and a faculty member. However, many institutions choose to include other faculty and staff to perform critical roles in the process. Some key staff who may be considered for inclusion on the Leadership Team are: the chief financial officer (CFO), the chief information technology officer (CIO), the chief student affairs officer, and the director of institutional research. Some institutions have also included student representation on the Leadership Team. Ultimately, the makeup of the Leadership Team reflects the preferences of the institution. The importance of the role of this team cannot be understated and the contributions that faculty and staff make at this level should also be appreciated.

### **The Accreditation Liaison**

The accreditation liaison is one of the most important positions in the accreditation/reaffirmation process. The COC requires all of its member institutions to appoint an accreditation liaison who is either a senior faculty member or an experienced administrator. This may include non-academic staff members. In fact, it is not uncommon for institutional researchers, librarians, or other staff to serve in this capacity. Some institutions choose to appoint academicians who are departmental chairs, deans, or vice presidents. Clearly, it is up to the institution to appoint the most suitable person to fill this critical role.

In addition to serving as a resource person to help prepare for and coordinate reaffirmation and other accrediting visits, the accreditation liaison has clear and specific responsibilities that include:

- Ensuring that the institution continuously complies with COC requirements and policies
- Providing periodic updates of COC policies and procedures to faculty, staff, and students
- Serving as the institution's contact with COC staff
- Coordinating the institution's annual profile reports to the COC
- Ensuring that electronic institutional data submitted to the COC is accurate and timely
- Notifying the Commission of institutional substantive changes and other program modifications (Commission on Colleges 2004)

To be effective in his/her role, the accreditation liaison must have the support of the institution, as well as that of the chief executive officer. The accreditation liaison also requires adequate financial resources and the time to fulfill these important responsibilities.

## **Committee/Task Force Members**

As stated previously, oversight of the production of the institution's Certification of Compliance and QEP is a major responsibility of the Leadership Team. Most Leadership Teams appoint several small subcommittees or task forces to complete these two central reaffirmation tasks. These committees must be carefully constructed to ensure that only faculty and staff with the requisite knowledge and skills are asked to serve. For compliance certification, the COC suggests that the institution focus on appointing committee members (faculty and staff) who are knowledgeable in such areas as institutional research, finance and business, student services, institutional effectiveness, libraries and other learning resources, enrollment management, educational programs, and governance. Committee members should also understand the institution's mission and have extensive knowledge of its history, culture, practices, policies, procedures, and data sources (Commission on Colleges 2004). The committee/task force structure underscores the relevance and value of faculty and staff working cooperatively to meet the demands of accreditation.

Many institutions also appoint support and logistics subcommittees to aid in the reaffirmation process. Such committees may be as specific as an information technology task force or as general as a planning committee for the visitation of the On-Site Review Committee. Although each institution has tremendous latitude in organizing its reaffirmation work, there are usually many committee service opportunities for both faculty and staff in this significant institutional activity.

## **Information Technology Specialist**

Information technology staff have a vital role to perform in the reaffirmation process. While the COC provides institutions the option of submitting reaffirmation reports in hard copy or electronically, institutions overwhelmingly choose to use an electronic format. In order to do so, an institution must have adequate staffing and the technical capability for such a major project. Some of the technical considerations include resources (hardware, software, bandwidth, CD/DVD replication capacity, etc.); personnel and expertise (in-house or outsourced); and training (for faculty, staff, and others). Selecting an electronic format therefore depends heavily on the institution's information technology staff. A decision about electronic submission should be made early in the planning process, and the institution should be willing and able to commit the resources necessary to comply with COC expectations. Because of the central role that electronic submission of information occupies throughout the reaffirmation process, some institutions appoint chief information technology officers to their Leadership Teams. Other institutions designate special information technology committees or task forces to help inform institutional decisions on the application of technology in the reaffirmation process.

Acceptable electronic formats for submitting compliance certification reports to the COC can be either Web-based (html) or CD/DVD-based (PDFs). Regardless of whether the report is prepared electronically, the institution must also submit one hard copy of the completed and signed Certification of Compliance. To assist institutions with the numerous issues related to the submission of electronic information, the COC has developed a comprehensive document, *Guidelines for Communicating Information Electronically*. It should also be noted that several commercially developed software packages are available that are specifically designed for the electronic submission of COC reaffirmation reports.



### **The Chief Financial Officer (CFO)**

The role of the chief financial officer (CFO) in the reaffirmation process is multifaceted. The major responsibility of the CFO is to ensure that the institution remains in compliance with the SACS Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards that relate to fiscal management and adequacy of resources. It is important for the CFO to understand the kinds of evidence needed to demonstrate compliance with these standards. The sooner the CFO has an accurate assessment of the institution's fiscal health, the better opportunity the institution has to make improvements. Radical changes in the financial health of an institution rarely result from a "quick fix" approach.

CFOs of small private institutions must be especially attentive to the COC's financial requirements. These institutions continue to be sanctioned by the COC for noncompliance with the financial standards at a disparate rate compared to other member institutions. Several valuable resources have been developed to assist CFOs in understanding these issues (McDemmond 2008; Townsley 2008). Also, the Southern Education Foundation continues to develop technical assistance programs for the chief financial officers of HBCUs in the SACS region.

The CFO should be involved in the early planning stages of the reaffirmation process. Adequate resources must be appropriated to the offices and programs that will assume additional responsibilities in the process. In fact, the CFO should work very closely with the Leadership Team to budget resources for all reaffirmation costs. Some institutions appoint CFOs to the Leadership Team to ensure that the fiscal demands of reaffirmation remain an institutional priority.

While the CFO should be aware of all reaffirmation costs, those that involve the QEP should receive special attention. In addition to funding the development of the QEP document, the institution must also include in its plan a commitment to provide adequate financial resources for the future implementation of the QEP. Without question, the CFO has one of the most demanding staff roles in the entire reaffirmation process.

### **Institutional Researchers**

Most institutions have designated offices of institutional research or they have institutional research functions assigned to other offices or areas. Because institutional research is important in an institution's planning and operations, this function also occupies a prominent role in the reaffirmation process. This role includes the provision of most of the institutional data that will be used to document compliance with COC principles of accreditation. The compliance certification process is data-driven, and institutional researchers are key support personnel in this regard. They also provide data to support the selection and development of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Institutional researchers routinely collect and analyze a variety of institutional data ranging from enrollment statistics to financials, and they are expected to prepare reports for internal and external purposes. The frequent reporting requirements of state and federal agencies, accreditors, governing boards, and other campus administrators place heavy demands on the time of institutional researchers. Therefore, it is essential for the Leadership Team to factor in institutional research during the early stages of planning for reaffirmation of accreditation.

## Other Faculty and Staff Roles in Reaffirmation

In effect, every department of an institution serves in some capacity in the reaffirmation process. Previously we provided a description of some of the vital faculty and staff roles in this process. Staff in many other areas of the institution are also engaged in the work of accreditation. In the table shown here we provide a sampling of some of these additional departments and the level of their involvement in the process. The roles they perform are broadly defined as (1) a major role in compliance certification or (2) a supportive role. Those that assume a major role in

compliance certification have a direct relationship to the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, or the Federal Requirements as outlined in the *Principles of Accreditation*. For example, academic support staff include such areas as academic counseling, tutorials, testing and evaluation, etc. Data from these areas are crucial for demonstrating compliance with several of the Comprehensive Standards. One such standard is CS 2.10: "The institution provides student support programs, services and activities consistent with its mission that support student learning and enhance the development of its students" (Commission on Colleges 2008). Clearly, academic support personnel play a fundamental role in documenting compliance with CS 2.10.

Other areas of the institution assume a more supportive role in the process. As an example, the table defines such a role for administrative support personnel. These staff members assist in the research for and preparation of reports, including the QEP, the compliance certification document, and others. They perform an indispensable role in ensuring that reports are accurate, professionally prepared, and meet the technical specifications mandated by the COC. Finally, it is significant to note that some departments have both supportive and compliance certification roles.

This table is not meant to be an exhaustive representation of all of the staffing areas of an institution that have some role in the reaffirmation process. Rather, it serves to further demonstrate the broad impact that reaffirmation has on the entire institution.

**TABLE I**  
**A SAMPLING OF OTHER STAFF ROLES**  
**IN REAFFIRMATION**

Institutional Staffing Area	Major Role in Compliance Certification	Supportive Role in Reaffirmation
Academic Support Staff	•	•
Student Affairs Personnel	•	•
Administrative Support Personnel		•
Physical Plant Personnel	•	•
Fiscal Affairs Personnel	•	•
Development/Institutional Advancement Personnel		•
Library/Learning Resources Personnel	•	•
Enrollment Management (Recruitment/ Admission, Financial Aid, etc.) Personnel	•	•
Planning and Evaluation Personnel	•	•

### Conclusion

The SACS *Principles of Accreditation* has ushered in a new era for reaffirmation of accreditation—in effect, a complete paradigm shift. These principles are reasonable and generally represent best practices in the higher education community. Member institutions and their accrediting body now work in partnership and mutually agree that the major foci of accreditation should be continuous institutional enhancement, institutional integrity, and improvements in student learning. The reaffirmation process has been restructured to provide institutions the opportunity to be more creative in demonstrating their commitment to quality enhancement and student learning. The QEP is one such vehicle, and it allows institutions to customize their plans to address the institutional issues that are most important to them. The current reaffirmation process also represents a continuous cycle of engagement between SACS and its member institutions.

The existing reaffirmation cycle does not eliminate the need for informed and effective institutional leadership (Hopps 2006). In fact, the leadership role in reaffirmation has been more clearly defined and expanded to include the accreditation liaison and the Leadership Team. The traditional roles that faculty and staff have assumed in reaffirmation have also been preserved. Faculty and staff have always comprised some of the best purveyors of institutional knowledge, culture, tradition, and practice. As the reaffirmation process undergoes its normal course of evolution, it is certain that faculty and staff roles will continue to factor prominently in any new scenarios. Reaffirmation of accreditation is unquestionably a process that requires both collaborative effort and considerable faculty and staff involvement.

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Dr. Leroy Davis Sr. is the primary consultant for the Southern Education Foundation's Center to Serve Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He is a retired president of South Carolina State University where he also served in a number of academic and administrative posts over a thirty-year career. He has been active with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) where he chaired more than twenty visiting accreditation committees and also served as a SACS commissioner. His work on accreditation has earned him wide-spread recognition and honors, including the coveted SACS Distinguished Service Award.

As a molecular biologist and educator, Dr. Davis has authored more than a dozen technical and scientific articles as well as several other scholarly publications. He has served on a number of national, regional and local boards of directors, including the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the South Carolina Governors School for Science and Mathematics (GSSM) and serves as the present Chair for the Jessie Ball duPont Fund Trustees.

He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including honorary degrees from Purdue University, South Carolina State University, Francis Marion University and Tuskegee University. He is also the recipient of the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest civilian award.

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