

# Tech officials look for ways to improve image

**By: Andrew Bell**

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As Texas Tech prepares for reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, members of the administration are looking at ways to improve the institutional effectiveness of the university.

SACS is a regional accrediting organization that evaluates schools and colleges in the southeastern portion of the United States, according to the SACS institutional self-study. Every 10 years Tech is required to go through the process of reaffirmation in order to assess and evaluate the progress of the university, Vice President for Student Affairs Michael Shonrock said.

"SACS is an institution report card," Shonrock said.

Peter Westfall, a professor of statistics and chairman of the Certification of Compliance Committee, said there are two main programs in the reaffirmation process.

The first program is the certification of compliance. The program documents the university's compliance with the core requirements and the comprehensive standards set forth by SACS, according to the SACS institutional self-study.

The focus behind the certification of compliance is to help students and show SACS the expected outcome of educational progress at Tech, Westfall said. Once the report is done, SACS has the option of granting full, partial or non-compliance, Shonrock said.

If the university is granted partial or non-compliance, Tech would have to submit a plan for achieving compliance, according to the SACS institutional self-study. To become reaffirmed, Tech is required to comply with all twelve of the core requirements issued by SACS and federal mandates for universities.

"The process is a lever to make changes if there are issues that need attention," Westfall said. "The accreditation process is an open expression of who we are - positive and negative."

The document for certification of compliance is a rough draft, Westfall said. The deadline for the completion of the document is Aug. 15. In November the certification of compliance will be evaluated by an off-site committee before the committee comes to campus in spring 2005, according to the SACS institutional self-study.

When the committee visits campus next year, the members of the committee will be able go visit anywhere on campus and ask anyone questions, Vice Provost Jim Brink said. This includes students, faculty, staff and administration.

Brink said he hopes the process will go by smoothly in the next year because the stakes for Tech are high.

"We can't get federal money unless we are accredited," he said. "We are playing for big stakes, because we have a very good university."

Within the core requirements issued by SACS is a requirement for a quality enhancement plan for the university. The plan requires Tech to focus on improving an educational aspect of the university, according to the SACS institutional self-study.

The requirements for the QEP is that the plan needs to impact as many units of the university as possible. Westfall said the QEP committee's job is to gather input from students and other individuals from on and off campus and make a goal to achieve continuous improvement in the university.

The university continuously comes up with strategic plans to contribute to the improvement of the campus. Shonrock said Tech has about 150 strategic plans ranging from effectiveness to costs.

In keeping with the university theme of providing direction for the students, the development of strategic plans have helped the administration prepare for the upcoming year, Shonrock said.

"As a result of planning for strategic planning policies, we have prepared for accreditation," he said.

Gary Elbow, faculty representative of the leadership team and professor in the economics and geography department, said he hopes whatever the QEP committee develops will have a positive effect on the university for a long time.