

Tech begins task of maintaining accreditation

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Texas Tech will soon begin the process of reaffirming its accreditation through the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges.

Universities must apply for accreditation every 10 years. It is required for many things, including qualifying for federal government grants and contracts and other federal programs like the Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

Tech has been accredited since 1928, which means the university has met and complied with SACS standards.

Vice Provost James Brink said SACS accredits institutions from beauty colleges to Level VI research, doctoral-granting universities, which is what Tech is.

Tech's report on accreditation for compliance is due Aug. 15, 2004. The Quality Enhancement Plan is due six weeks before an on-site visit from SACS.

Brink said Level VI universities are evaluated by people from other Level VI universities. The only requirement is they cannot come from the same state the university is in.

Brink said this accreditation will not be as painful as ones in the past.

"In the past this has been a very arduous process," Brink said. "They (SACS) used to have a book of 468 criteria, which I called the 'adolescent approach.' By that, I mean the authority doesn't believe anything you say, and you must prove everything. Now what we have is more of an 'adult approach.' Now there are only 68 standards to meet; it asks you 'do you comply with this standard, if so tell us how?'"

Brink said instead of a lengthy 3-inch thick book as a report, they will instead be able to submit an online report that will link readers to other sources that will corroborate the university's claims of being compliant.

Brink said in this report they will tell the university's story.

"We have to tell the story of the university," he said. "They want to know if our students are getting a good education, if the core-curriculum classes are laying a solid foundation for the students' education. They are also interested in things like students services being available like the recreation center and whether the buildings on campus are heated or cooled properly, everyone is truly involved."

Brink said the key to the reaffirmation process is constant assessment.

"We are constantly assessing what we're doing, whether it be groundskeepers, traffic and parking or the School of Mass Communications," Brink said. "We need to make changes based on assessment and always make sure what we are doing is right. If it's not, we have to know how to fix it."

The other element of the reaffirmation process is the Quality Enhancement Plan. This plan will take feedback from the university community and use it to better the current state of the university.

The Quality Enhancement Plan is due by February 2005 at the earliest. The plan will include suggestions provided by SACS, which will get feedback from the university community, including students, faculty, staff and alumni.

"The QEP is very exciting because it involves as much of the university as possible," Brink said. "An on-site committee will come in Spring 2005 to look at our QEP. When we tell them we're going to do something very ambitious, they'll want to know how we're going to accomplish these goals. They're coming to pick apart what we said in the QEP report and then they write a report based on their visit. That will be sent to the SACS membership and in December 2005 they will make the decision whether we've been reaffirmed for both compliance and the QEP at the same time."

Sue Couch, chairwoman of the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee and a professor in the College of Human Sciences, said the main focus is to improve student learning.

"The purpose of the QEP is to improve student learning over the years to come, by focusing on some issues that can improve student learning," Couch said. "We'll be asking the university community for input on that."

Gary Elbow, professor of geography, said there is a link of Tech's homepage for SACS reaffirmation at www.ttu.edu. In a few weeks it will include a questionnaire for students, faculty and alumni to fill out.

"We will ask people to rank five suggestions that were identified by the Quality Enhancement Program," Elbow said. "We can identify what people's priorities are based off their answers. There will also be a space to add additional input for issues that weren't addressed."

Issues that will be addressed in the questionnaire include experiential learning such as internships, ethics and professionalism, improving diversity and undergraduate, and graduate research and teaching.

"The committee will take feedback and use it as one of the things they look at to pick what the QEP is going to do," Elbow said. "It's not like a beauty contest though, if item No. 1 gets 20 votes and item No. 2 gets 15 votes, No. 2 won't be thrown out, everything will be looked at."

