

# Tech implements survey as part of accreditation plan

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Ethics can be defined in a number of different ways, but the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee is trying through an online survey to pinpoint which definition Texas Tech students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni consider pertinent to the educational system.

The committee conducted a survey in the fall to determine a focus theme for the Quality Enhancement Plan that is required for reaffirmation of accreditation.

Through the campus-wide survey, the committee determined ethics to be a prime concern, said Sue Couch, professor of family and consumer sciences education and chairwoman of the committee.

"The committee purposely has not tried to define ethics," she said. "We are asking at this point the important ethical issues that need to be addressed specifically."

A second online survey is available to direct the committee toward a definition of ethics. The survey asks three questions relating to ethics and its impact on student learning.

The survey is available at <http://www.irim.ttu.edu/SACS/QEPEthics-OthersSurvey.htm> until April 15, Couch said.

"We would hope that anyone who has an interest would tell us what they think," she said. "We want people to give us feedback and have an opportunity to say what they want."

The Quality Enhancement Plan focuses on improving an aspect of the educational component of Tech that enhances the quality of student learning, Couch said.

The plan serves as a commitment by Tech to identify an area for improvement, to develop a way to meet specific, measurable goals and to engage in ongoing assessments of progress.

Couch said in five years Tech must present the impact the Quality Enhancement Plan on student learning to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Tech's accrediting body. The deadline for the plan is the first week of February 2005 or six weeks before the on-site committee's visit.

The on-site committee will visit Tech for three days between March 14 and April 29, 2005, to evaluate, advise ways of improvement and follow up on compliance questions.

The plan is one document required by SACS before Tech can be reaccredited.

SACS is the regional accrediting organization for eleven states in the southeastern United States and for Tech.

Universities are reaccredited every 10 years, Couch said.

Tech was last reaccredited in 1994 but at the request of SACS the 2004 reaffirmation was delayed a year.

The process for reaffirmation changed in December 2001, Couch said.

The new reaffirmation process is no longer called reaccreditation and no longer requires a lengthy, detailed internal self-study.

The new method reflects the view that accreditation is an ongoing process and not a status that must be renewed each decade. The institution must be in constant self-assessment, which is goal-oriented. Specific goals must be identified and met by the institution.

Tech must also meet 12 core requirements and 53 comprehensive standards, along with eight federal mandates, according to the SACS Institutional Self-Study Web site.

Tech officials must prepare a Certification of Compliance along with the Quality Enhancement Plan to SACS.

The certification documents Tech's compliance of the three types of requirements and standards. The deadline for this document is August 15, according to the Web site.

Determination of reaffirmation will be announced in December 2005, and Tech is doing all it can to make sure reaccreditation is not a problem, which is why the survey was introduced.

Couch said the survey provides free-response questions, allowing those taking it to define ethics in whichever way they wish. While she said she is not sure why the faculty and students chose ethics as the main theme for the plan, Couch said publicized lapses in business and society could be one reason. Concerns about cheating and a lack of academic honesty could be another, she said.

Gary Elbow, professor of geography and faculty representative to SACS, said he has a personal definition of the theme.

"I would define ethics as treating people the way you would want to be treated yourself," he said.

Reaffirmation is important to Tech, Elbow said, and the committee needs input from the student body and faculty.

"This reaffirmation is what makes a university work," he said. "It is important for people to respond. Whatever the committee chose as a theme, in order for this to have any impact we have to have support."

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