

Committees formed to analyze Tech's compliance

By: Michael Castellon

Posted: 4/21/04

The process of earning and maintaining accreditation for a university is a challenging task. How a university is perceived and evaluated by its governing accreditation body plays a major role in how a university is perceived by potential students, faculty and funding dollars.

The review process serves to maintain and evaluate the quality of education offered by colleges and universities, and can have a major impact on the value of a degree offered by an institution.

At Texas Tech, two committees have been formed to analyze both the university's current compliance status, and determine what areas of compliance require improvement.

The Compliance Certification Committee will offer a final report in August, and will submit the report to the Southwest Association of Colleges and Schools, Tech's accrediting organization. SACS is expected to vote on the university's accreditation status in December.

One category Tech officials are hoping to improve on is student to faculty ratio. Earlier this year, Tech President Jon Whitmore announced a plan that would allow for the hiring of about 100 new faculty during the next three years.

"Making sure we have an adequate student to faculty ratio is an important part of compliance," Vice Provost Jim Brink said. "This is quality hiring that's going to be taking place. (Whitmore) has admonished to deans and department chairs to hire quality faculty."

Gary Elbow, a professor of geography and faculty representative to SACS, said the Compliance Certification Committee is currently identifying and addressing weaknesses that exist within the university's Operation Policies.

"Most of what we're doing is pretty technical stuff, like O.P.'s that need to be cleaned up and brought into line, but there are no crises," he said. "A lot of the O.P.'s that need changing were sent to Dr. Brink, who will take care of it from there."

Examples of glitches that exist in the Operating Policy Handbook include differing mission statements between the university and the Regent's Rules, the university's Board of Regents' guidelines.

"When we began putting together our Strategic Plan, that mission statement was sent to the Board of Regents in November of 2001, where they approved it, and that mission statement was

published in the university's publications, but wasn't updated in the Regent's Rules," he said. "These are the changes that we have to refer to in order to be compliant.

Similarly, the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee is reviewing initiatives that increase the quality of output the university is offering to its students, staff and faculty. A major focus of that committee has been finding ways to increase awareness of ethics at the university.

"We need to establish a solid ethical base," Brink said. "What we want to do is start having courses on ethics, speakers on campus who promote ethics, and create a campus conversation that would promote ethics throughout our lives."

The decision to improve on areas of ethics, Brink said, was established by the results of a questionnaire distributed to students, faculty and staff.

"We received a lot of feedback, especially from students, that stressed the need for academic integrity and similar areas," he said. "We thought ethics could be a huge umbrella for these issues."

In addition, Brink said the university will examine components of everyday operation to evaluate compliance.

"Are the courses we're offering sufficient enough? Do we have adequate library facilities? These are the types of questions we have to ask in this process," he said.