The Chair of the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools (SACS) On-Site Committee is Dr. Homer D. Kemp, Interim Chair of the Department of English and Communications at Tennessee Tech University. He has served on the Faculty Senate for 25 years, and held the position of Faculty Senate Chair. Dr. Kemp has worked with SACS for many years, and chaired numerous On-Site Committee visits including one at North Carolina Central University.

Homer D. Kemp, Ph.D.
Tennessee Tech
University Visited FSU
March 22, 2011

The visiting team will include a current university president, a vice provost, a director of institutional effectiveness, a vice president for student life, a professor of nursing, and a director of quality enhancement and critical thinking studies. There will also be a vice president from the SACS office working with the committee. Team members are from the states of KY, SC, TN, AL, VA, GA, and TX. The team will visit April 19-21, 2011.

Get Ready, They Are On The Way!

- What can you do to get ready for the team from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)? Read more on the back page.
- Become familiar with the FSU quality enhancement plan. Don’t know what that is? Read the articles in this newsletter to find out more.
- Become familiar with the Operational Plan and Assessment Report (OPAR) for your unit. Don’t know what that is? Read more on back.
What Is A QEP?

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a requirement of the reaffirmation process that enhances the quality of higher education and student learning. An acceptable QEP:

- Includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment.
- Focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.
- Demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP.
- Includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP.
- Identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.
- As part of the reaffirmation process an On-Site Committee Visit is made to assess the institution’s plan and capacity to implement and assess the plan.

The On-site Team will determine what, if any, QEP recommendations are necessary during the April 19-21 visit.

What Is FSU’s QEP?

The Fayetteville State University Quality Enhancement Plan is titled, Making Evidence-Based Decisions (MEBD). The plan focuses on assessment of student learning and faculty/staff development to improve students’ critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills.

FSU students will demonstrate continued growth in making evidence-based decisions from lower-through upper-division studies. Student learning will be guided by well sequenced learning opportunities in the classroom and outside of classes. Students enrolled in units participating in the MEBD will be introduced to critical thinking rubrics which will build skills for self-evaluation.

Why MEBD?

Fayetteville State University developed Making Evidence-Based Decisions (MEBD) in response to suggestions by faculty, staff, and students that the experience at FSU would be enhanced if personal responsibility was practiced more on campus. In addition, on the National Survey of Student Engagement, our students reported that FSU helped them think critically and analytically. However, our student responses ranked FSU proportionately lower in this category compared to peer institutions. Through the improvement of student learning in critical thinking, FSU hopes to address these important issues related to personal responsibility in a way that has lifelong implications. The Fayetteville State University Quality Enhancement Plan, Making Evidence-Based Decisions (MEBD), will stress the building blocks for critical thinking: reading comprehension, writing composition, information literacy, and practice in evidence-based decision-making.
How is MEBD Going to Work?

How Are We Doing This?

- Students will be encouraged to report Rising Junior Scores as part of a major course—collecting baseline data for majors.
- Groups of faculty and staff will be involved in professional development to acquire strategies for facilitating and assessing critical thinking, specifically evidence-based decision-making.
- Faculty and staff will embed CLA-style performance tasks in the upper division curriculum or co-curricular activities and report assessment results for comparison to baseline data.

Who Will Be Involved in MEBD?

Junior- and senior-level students in departments selected to participate in the MEBD. The infrastructure needed to implement the MEBD will include the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of Faculty Development, an Assistant Director of Faculty Development, a Coordinator of CLA Assessments, University Testing Office, five professional development pathway directors, teams of faculty and staff from participating units to include at least three teams from among the School of Education, the School of Business and Economics, the College of Arts and Sciences and two co-curricular teams from among those units making up the Division of Student Affairs and Athletics, CLA assessment teams of faculty and staff, CLA task development teams from among faculty and staff, the Evaluation Team to include university faculty on and off campus, the marketing team comprised of faculty staff and students, and the MEBD digital commons team comprised of technologists, librarians, faculty and staff.

Broad involvement across FSU will be required for success.

How Will the MEBD Be Evaluated?

MEBD goals have been identified for planning, student learning outcomes and professional development implementation. There are plans for multiple means of assessment for each component of MEBD.

**Planning Stage Assessment Measures:** Survey of participation in professional development, Feedback on QEP Forum (Survey), Senior Exit Exam (CLA-like performance tasks), Proposal Rubric for Requests for Participation by units/departments, Quarterly Report using SWOT-style analysis.

**Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Measures:** Internally generated CLA-style performance tasks, CLA performance tasks, Rubric for course embedded assignments, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) item 11e.

**Professional Development Activities Assessment Measures:** Feedback on rubric training (Survey), Feedback (Survey) on training to develop Rubrics for Reusable Instructional Objects (RIOs) and Using RIOs, focus group reports, quarterly reports.
The On-site SACS visit is one of the steps in the reaffirmation of accreditation process that Fayetteville State University undertakes every ten years. Successful accreditation reviews ensure the public and the US Department of Education that the dollars spent at FSU in the form of financial aid are buying a high quality education.

The reaffirmation is a peer review process that examines the institution’s mission, policies, procedures, programs, resources, services, and other activities to determine if they support compliance with the SACS standards found in the SACS Principles of Accreditation. You may view this document at www.sacscoc.org for an in-depth description of the standards. The standards cover all aspects of the university and have an outcomes based orientation. That means the standards require documentation that university has defined its mission and has evidence to document that the mission has been accomplished.

The university is required to write a compliance report stating how it meets each standard and submitting evidence to support its claims. That document is read by a group of practicing higher education professionals and the judgment is made whether the institution is in compliance. This Off-site team provides a report to the institution and the Focused Report is produced by the institution with responses to the non-compliance issues.

SACS COC, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, is one of 7 regional accrediting agencies in the US.

This report along with the Off-site Team report is sent to the On-site Team. They visit the campus for two days to seek confirmation of the compliance asserted in the Focused Report and the Compliance Report. The US Department of Education requires that the On-site Team verify the compliance with fifteen standards (see the front cover) and SACS requires that the On-site Team assess the quality enhancement plan. The On-site Team will make recommendations of compliance based on its findings and send these recommendations to the institution to address and to the SACS Criteria and Reports Committee. The institution sends its responses to the C&R Committee, also. The C&R Committee recommends to the SACS COC Trustees whether the accreditation of the institution is reaffirmed or denied. The Trustees’ decision is announced at the SACS Annual Meeting in December, 2011.

OPAR? What’s That?
The Operational Plan and Assessment Report (OPAR) is FSU’s tool for engaging in annual planning, assessment and evaluation aligned to FSU’s Five Year Strategic Plan. The OPAR is where each of the units on campus responsible for planning annual outcomes identify and record goals and measurable objectives that align with the Strategic Plan.

The OPAR also includes the measures and criteria that will be used to determine if the outcomes have been met successfully. At the end of the year, the unit evaluates the results of its planning and assessment. Reflections and recommendations for improving the unit for the next year are recorded on the OPAR.

This cycle is continued annually and all planning unit OPARs are reviewed collectively to determine the success of the entire university in meeting the goals in the FSU Strategic Plan. These documents and this cyclical process are the way institutional effectiveness is demonstrated to SACS COC. All campus employees should be familiar with their unit’s OPAR.