General Information on the Reaffirmation Process

Founded in 1895, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is currently comprised of the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) and the Commission on Colleges (COC). The Commission on Colleges was founded in 1912 and was organized to develop standards and a process for accrediting colleges and universities in the South.

The accrediting standards used by the Commission on Colleges are contained in the handbook, *Principles of Accreditation*. This document provides consistent guidelines for peer review, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education.

Approximately six months prior to the scheduled reaffirmation visit, an institution must submit a Compliance Certification document that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Regulations as presented in the Principles. The Compliance Certification document is reviewed by an off-site review committee which advises the on-site review committee by making observations about the information the institution provides and by determining the institution's compliance with standards.

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation. Each institution seeking reaffirmation of Accreditation is required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning.

At the culmination of the QEP, the Commission on Colleges sends an on-site committee of professional peers to the campus to assess the educational strengths and weaknesses of the institution. The written report of the committee helps the institution improve its programs, refine its QEP, and also provides the basis on which the Commission decides to grant, continue, reaffirm, or withdraw accreditation.

During a typical three-day visit, committee members examine data and conduct interviews in order to evaluate the soundness of the QEP and ascertain whether the institution is in compliance with the Principles. The committee offers written advice to the institution, develops a consensus on its findings, and completes a draft report. Finally, the committee presents an oral summary in an exit report to the chief executive officer and invited institutional officials on the last day of the visit.

The departure of the committee from campus does not mark the end of the reaffirmation process. The visiting committee report and the response of the institution to the findings of the committee are reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports, a standing committee of the Commission. The Committee on Compliance and Reports recommends action on reaffirmation to the Executive Council of the Commission. The Executive Council in turn recommends action to the Commission on Colleges, which makes the final decision. These decisions are announced to the College Delegate Assembly during its annual business session.

The above is taken directly from SACS website: [http://www.sacscoc.org/genaccproc.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/genaccproc.asp)