



Academic Affairs Newsletter

SACS EXTRA!

Dr. Virginia M. Carson

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This special edition of the Academic Affairs Newsletter is a celebration of who we are and our values! The first thing the Chair of the SACS On-Site Team said in reporting out was that Georgia Highlands College was what SACS was thinking about when they wrote the integrity standard! This is an absolutely amazing and gratifying reward to all of us for our hard work in preparing for our decennial reaffirmation of accreditation. Then a Team member said that it was clear that GHC is "an excellent example of a college working together for students." The external peer review for college accreditation is perhaps the hallmark of US higher education. This gives us specific information on an established standard about the quality of our institution.

Some of those who played a role in constructing the reports and preparing for the visit are:

- Every faculty member at the college is a member of an assessment team that annually reviews the educational program.
- Each member of the Administrative Council annually assesses services to students.
- Two committees worked to produce and implement the QEP.
- The Information Technology Department provided the backbone for the electronic institutional report and services to the On-Site Team.
- The Accounting and Purchasing Departments provided essential services for the logistics of the visit.
- The Plant Department assured that the college facilities looked their best for visitors.

Many GHC individuals too numerous to mention gave hours of their time for this endeavor.

The results are truly something of which we can be proud. As an elected Commissioner of the SACS Commission on Colleges, I've seen the other side of the coin. This is a wonderful external validation of GHC. The actual reaffirmation will be considered by the Commission on Colleges at the June 2008 meeting. But we certainly stand well at this stage of the game.

As we pause to mark this accomplishment, we must prepare for the next stages of institutional development. First, the Team noted the explosive growth being experienced by the college. They saw that we had managed growth well so far in the six years in which the enrollment has almost doubled. They cautioned us to strive to maintain that success with the growth yet on the horizon.

And on the assessment front, not only can we not relax our guard, we must redouble our efforts. (Sorry, Jon!) The assessment of the QEP is embedded in the institutional assessment processes. There is a Five-Year Report due in 2013 on how the QEP has improved student learning. This report necessarily will mean that GHC is engaged in continuous quality improvement for the educational program and services to students.

One aspect of our success is clearly that leadership is broad and deep at GHC. Those who aspire to leadership here might consider being a part of the 2008-9 Leadership Academy. It will address nuts and bolts topics as well as opportunities for self-reflection. Information will be available in Spring 2008.

I am PROUD to be a member of the GHC team!

Few Things Are as Gratifying as Really Great SACS: Dr. Laura Musselwhite Reflects on the Recent SACS Visit



*Dr. Laura Musselwhite
Chair, GHC Reaffirmation Team*

On Wednesday, October 17, I successfully dropped off six SACS on-site committee members at the Atlanta airport. It was the culmination of several days of stress and angst over logistics, food, supplies, etc. Oh, and then there was the content of their visit! I was thrilled to hear at the exit interview, just before the trip to the airport, that much of my angst had been wasted. What I mean is that we had a great outcome to our visit, with only one compliance issue outstanding and two suggestions to strengthen our QEP.

We should all feel incredibly positive about our institution and the state of student learning at GHC. Before the committee arrived on campus Monday the 15th, we had thirteen outstanding compliance issues and an as-yet-unjudged QEP. There were twelve members of our on-site committee, all of whom arrived ready to work hard on our behalf. They came to campus Monday afternoon, all day Tuesday, and finished up with the exit interview Wednesday morning. Six committee members visited various instructional sites Monday morning, including Heritage Hall, Cartersville, and Acworth. There were no hitherto-unknown compliance issues that arose during any of those visits. Monday afternoon the group dealt with compliance issues and were able to resolve all but one of the thirteen. That one dealt with the assessment of cooperative degrees with our two technical college partners. We will be developing a plan to ensure that GHC has oversight of this assessment, just as we do with our own educational program assessment. At that point, all parties were able to concentrate on IC@GHC, our QEP.

The SACS on-site committee met with the QEP committee several times, plus had lunch meetings with various campus constituencies to ask about the QEP. I am especially grateful to the students, staff, and faculty who were willing to meet with them. Additionally, we should express our gratitude to Mr. Willis Potts, our local Regent on the Georgia Board of Regents, who made time in his schedule to meet with several SACS committee members.

At the end of the committee visit on Wednesday morning, the GHC SACS Leadership Team and QEP Committee were thrilled (I have said thrilled twice now!) to learn that we only had one compliance issue and that our QEP had been deemed acceptable. Their acceptance of the QEP is a very important item, since a quality QEP is the final core requirement in the SACS criteria. The on-site committee had only two suggestions for our QEP -- that we create a five year budget and that we more clearly outline how our topic emerged from an institutional effectiveness process. We will have no problem in accomplishing either of these tasks. We will write a follow-up report on these issues, which the SACS Commission will review in June, the official time of our reaffirmation.

So, we are back to the drive to the airport. Six cheery SACS committee members emerged from the big van to head back to their respective lives, leaving GHC with kudos and a very fulfilling visit. What I have not mentioned is how complimentary the committee was during the exit interview. They mentioned not only our endeavors to resolve our compliance issues and produce a quality QEP, but also the caliber of our work. They talked about our integrity during the process, and the true collegiality we possess. Several said how impressed they were with our ability to work as a unit. At the very end of the visit, one of our faculty said to me, "They can tell when people are faking it, and when people are sincere." I truly believe that to be the case -- we have a wonderful institution of which we should all be proud. This is a moment for GHC to pat itself on the back, over and over. This has been a very busy two years, with all members of the college family adding to the process. We all shared the work; we can now all share the reward!

The Joys of Satisfying SACS: Leslie Johnson Describes the SACS Visit from a QEP Perspective

By Leslie Johnson, Instructor in Communications

Whew! What can I say? Exciting, stressful, and nerve-wracking would only hit the surface of the emotions all of us experienced last week. From the perspective of a QEP participant, the SACS visit developed into a wonderful recognition of the hard work put forth by everyone since the inception of IC @ GHC. It was also a great opportunity to get excellent suggestions as we proceed into the next five years.

The Joys of Satisfying SACS, continued.

As I quickly came to realize over the last couple of months, the QEP was a primary focus of this SACS visit. Many hours were spent during the visit answering questions about how we selected IC @ GHC as our QEP, how we planned to implement it over the next few years, and if we had the available funds to sustain the plan. Thankfully, our answers seemed to meet the expectations of our SACS visitors, and IC @ GHC was deemed "acceptable," which I have been told is a good thing in SACS-speak.

The SACS committee gave us a couple of recommendations to work on. These include fine-tuning our projected needs for the next few years, and increasing the role of our institutional effectiveness practices within the QEP in order to get a more global picture of our anticipated results.



The majority of the feedback we received was extremely positive. Not only did the SACS committee see our QEP as unique, but they also suggested that we investigate avenues in which to publish our QEP experience. The possibility of holding workshops to train other institutions in the development of their QEPs was another idea offered by the committee. Probably one of the most exhilarating comments was one in which a SACS member stated that she came to GHC thinking that we needed to learn a thing or two about information literacy, instead, however, she left feeling that she had been the one to learn something.

The SACS visit was truly a success, but it would not have been possible without the hours of hard work put forth by all of the members of the QEP Authoring Committee and Implementation Committee. These members crafted a wonderful plan which will help our students become more successful, well-rounded individuals. In addition, all of you who have promoted IC in your classes, talked with SACS members about IC @ GHC, or just spoken positively about our plan to others are responsible for this success thus far.

Thank you all so much for your help with IC @ GHC and please continue to stress the importance of this plan in your classes and with your peers. Our hope is that Information Competency will be a permanent and integral component of learning at Georgia Highlands College

Cyber SACS: Meet the Man Behind the Web, Michael Diprima



*Michael Diprima
Webmaster*

A large part of the SACS accreditation process involved the online presentation of information by GHC. That is, we created web pages, CDs, etc. for the committee to review for compliance. The planning phase alone for this aspect of the process was monumental. Add to that the actual implementation and one can begin to imagine the scope of such a project, which is especially critical given that the presentation of electronic data is the first glimpse an off-site committee has of an institution. If all goes well with the electronic compliance portion of a SACS visit, one can hope that the on-site visit will be less about compliance and more about the QEP. But if the electronic visit goes awry - - - well, it's best not to even think about that.

Much of the burden for this electronic presence was shouldered by our own Michael Diprima, the often emailed but seldom seen webmaster himself. Michael spent countless hours working on this portion of the project and was always ready to help whenever he received a frantic call or e-mail requesting his assistance immediately. "Our reaffirmation process was a textbook example of teamwork," Diprima confirmed. "Converting that much raw data into meaningful information successfully is a testament to the hard work and organizational skills shown by our SACS committee and to the leadership of Dr. Laura Musselwhite." Thanks, Michael!