



February 2009

College Preparing Responses to SACS Recommendations

Wharton County Junior College is in its final year of a four-year process to gain Reaffirmation of Accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). This is the regional accrediting body for degree-granting higher education institutions in the 11 Southern states that extend from Virginia to Texas.

WCJC's SACS Leadership Team is currently on schedule in preparing responses to the findings presented by the SACS On-Site Review Committee following its three-day visit last October. Recommendations address findings from both the on-site visit as well as an off-site committee's review of the college's self-evaluation as submitted in its SACS Compliance Certification document. The Report of the Reaffirmation Committee is available on the college's Intranet.

The SACS committee recommended revisions to only two areas related to the college's compliance with SAC's Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards. Dr. Michael Johnson, the SACS representative to WCJC, congratulated the college faculty and staff for a successful compliance report.

QEP Undergoing Revisions

Other recommendations by SACS focused on revisions to the five-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). SACS requested the college to more clearly describe the issues addressed by this student success initiative and its intended outcomes. The SACS committee also suggested narrowing the audience among first-year students. WCJC received praise for the relevancy of the course content and the broad-based participation of faculty and staff in the self-evaluation process.

The QEP Response Team has reviewed the SACS data and is recommending targeting first-year students whose THEA or ASSET scores in reading indicate a lack of readiness for freshman-level courses. This student group includes approximately 300 students

per year. Depending on their scores, WCJC will offer these students READ 0306 (Reading Survey 1) or require them to concurrently take READ 0307 (Reading Survey 2) and PSYC 1300 (Learning Framework). Academic advising will also be required, and the QEP calls for an expansion of the services offered at WCJC's Learning Assistance Centers.

The overarching QEP goals for these first-year students are threefold:

- to achieve success in READ 0307 so they can advance to college-level courses
- to acquire learning skills to succeed in college coursework
- to identify and utilize support services to promote college success

Students whose scores indicate college readiness will have the option of taking PSYC 1300. This semester WCJC is piloting the QEP with "Get in Gear for a Great 1st Year," which is being implemented through the PSYC 1300 course. Students are learning to utilize various success strategies for studying, notetaking, time management, and communication. They are also identifying their individual learning styles. Refinements to course content will occur in response to assessments of students' skills.

Ultimately, the long-term goal of QEP is to help students be successful in college and achieve the goals they set for themselves. For WCJC this translates into improved student persistence rates and improved GPAs for students in their introductory core courses. That's why the QEP calls for professional development to better equip faculty/staff to meet the needs of students. If data support positive student outcomes after three years, the QEP may be expanded to include students with writing deficits.

Revisions due in March

All responses and revisions to both the compliance report and the QEP are scheduled to be completed in March. The actual due date to SACS is Monday, March 23. The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools meets in June to review the college's responses. The Commission will announce its decision about WCJC's accreditation status in December.

