



## SACSCOC Frequently Asked Questions

### What is SACSCOC?

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in 11 Southern states – **Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia including Latin America and other international sites that award associate, baccalaureate, master’s or doctoral degrees.**

A part from making sure that each accredited institution performs honestly and provides high-quality programs designed to address the needs of students, SACSCOC has maintained a powerful voice to affect the policies and laws that influence institutional members. The commission has committed itself to the peer review process, institutional integrity, quality enhancement, continuous improvement, and student learning. (SACSCOC core values <https://sacscoc.org/>)

### What is accreditation and why is it important?

Accreditation is intended to assure constituents and the public of the institution’s continuing commitment to integrity and its capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon accreditation standards. When accreditation is awarded after a rigorous external SACSCOC review process, it means that the institution has (1) a mission appropriate to higher education, (2) resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain its mission, (3) clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that it is (4) successful in assessing its achievement of these objectives and demonstrating improvements.

### How often does an institution undergo the accreditation process?

To maintain accreditation, institutions must undergo a comprehensive off-site and on-site review for reaffirmation every 10 years to show compliance with all SACSCOC standards, policies, and procedures followed by 5 year interim reporting. Originally accredited as Albany State College by SACSCOC in 1951, Albany State University (ASU) was reaffirmed in 2008. In December 2016, accreditation and reaffirmation was granted when SACSCOC approved substantive change for the consolidation of ASU and Darton State College to form the new ASU effective January 2017. Since the consolidation, the University's next reaffirmation was set for 2020 and has been postponed to 2021.

### **Which standards should an institution fulfill to acquire or retain accreditation?**

Standards are set forth in the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* and with the policies and procedures of the Commission. For additional information about the principles, please see SACSCOC website at <https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/>. Refer to policies and procedures at <http://sacscoc.org/documents/> and then select document type to choose from a list of documents made available alphabetically by title.

### **How can I determine whether or not an institution has been accredited by the SACSCOC?**

SACSCOC prints an extensive list of accredited institutions on its website <https://sacscoc.org/institutions>.

- For the listing of those institutions, please refer to the *Accredited, Candidate, and Applicant Institution List tab*.
- For accreditation standards, please refer to *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*.
- For policies, please refer to the *Policies, Guidelines, Good Practices and Position Statements choose from an array of policies specified alphabetically by title*.

### **What constitutes reaffirmation?**

The SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* requires institutions to show compliance by displaying over 90 standards with an emphasis on goals and outcomes as the methods of institutional effectiveness. <https://sacscoc.org/>

The *Principles of Accreditation* are based upon the following four basic elements;

- Peer review
- Institutional integrity
- Continuous improvement
- Student learning

To demonstrate compliance of the 90+ required standards, Albany State will present a Compliance Certification Report (CCR) and a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The documentation gives a focused outline for strengthening the area of the University that will affect student learning. The CCR will be examined by an off-site committee and an on-site committee. The on-site committee will review the QEP plan separately.

### **What is Compliance Certification?**

The Compliance Certification is a self-study report with narrative responses and supporting documentation that institutions prepare attesting to their adherence with each of the Principles of Accreditation. The report consists of responses to 14 sections of the principles. As part of this reaffirmation review, ASU's Compliance Certification was submitted in September 2019.

### **Compliance Certification Report (CCR)**

The CCR is a document compiled by members of the Albany State University community, which demonstrates the compliance of each SACSCOC standard via narrative and supporting data. The narrative and supporting documentation provides a compelling case that the University is compliant, once it has been written. Once all members of the Compliance Team has finished their writing assignments, the Reaffirmation Leadership Team gathers the report then modifies and provides edits as needed. The CCR calls for a thorough examination of all facets of the institution, and the projects include numerous entities and the institutional resources. Collaboration and communication in this cooperative endeavor is crucial to the achievement of ASU's reaffirmation. Our CCR was presented to SACSCOC in September 2019.

### **What is Focused Report?**

The Focused Report is prepared to respond to address any issues of non-compliance raised by off-site review of Compliance Certification. Similar to Compliance Certification Report, this report contains institutional plans with supporting documentation. The area of greatest concern in the Focused Report is the ongoing need to demonstrate an assessment process in general education outcomes wherein we establish outcomes, assess the ability of students to demonstrate those outcomes, and work to improve our programs based on our analysis of the assessment results.

### **What is a QEP?**

QEP stands for Quality Enhancement Plan. The QEP is an important part of ASU's reaccreditation process, but it is also a significant opportunity to examine our processes and help our students achieve success.

### **Why is the QEP important?**

By definition, the QEP describes a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and specific topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should be embedded within ongoing, integrated, institution-wide planning and evaluation processes. It should reflect and affirm the commitment to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning.

### **What is ASU's QEP?**

Our QEP is called **Guiding Principles to Success**, and it is a five-year plan focused on student success and designed to strengthen progression to graduation rates. Through our QEP, we will decrease the DFW rates in 11 high enrollment courses; decrease the number of students on probation, suspension, and dismissal; increase the fall-to-fall, first year retention rates; and increase student awareness of academic policies and resources related to progression and degree completion.

### **Why did ASU choose this topic?**

A committee of faculty and staff selected the QEP topic utilizing analyze of student success data from fall 2018 in comparison to peer institutions within the University System of Georgia. During this same time period, ASU was participating in a system-wide effort called Gateway to Completion® (G2C) through the Gardner Institute in an effort to reduce DFW rates in high enrollment courses. Given the institutional priority of student success and the need for cross-functional involvement to improve persistence and completion rates, ASU ultimately selected Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) as our QEP topic.

### **How does the QEP benefit students?**

Students will be provided access to enhanced resources to assist them in their progression to degree completion. The QEP begins with Student Success Coaches who are assigned to advise students who have earned less than 60 credit hours. These Coaches will help students navigate the core curriculum requirements to stay on track to graduation as well as ensure they are aware of their rights and responsibilities under ASU's academic policies and procedures. They will direct students to academic and student support services by serving as the main institutional touch point for lower division students.

Faculty will partner with these Student Success Coaches to ensure students who are struggling in class are being connected with appropriate resources. If a faculty member notices a student is missing class frequently or are not handing in or failing assignments, for instance, they will use an early alert system to notify the Coach of these issues. The Coach will then reach out to the student to assist them in getting back on track to success.

First-year students will also take part in a newly redesigned First Year Experience Course (ASU 1101) which will introduce them to a variety of on-campus resources as well as start them on the path to career exploration and preparation. The addition of Peer Mentors to each section of ASU

1101 will provide students with a greater sense of connection to the institution and mentorship throughout their first year on campus.

All students will benefit from the redesign of 11 high enrollment courses, ranging from English to math to biology, that have historically had high DFW rates. These courses represent ones many students are either required to take or choose to take to fulfill core requirements. However, many students struggle to pass these classes. In order to increase the number of students who successfully complete these courses the first time they enroll, course structure and requirements will be evaluated and improvements implemented.

In order to enhance learning in the classroom, all students will be able to take advantage of study tables in 30+ courses. These tables, which are offered two evenings a week, provide students with the opportunity to seek help from instructors and peer-tutors in a supportive environment through one-on-one or small group sessions.

Finally, after students have earned 60 credit hours, they will transition from a Student Success Coach to a Faculty Advisor in their major. This person is an expert in their academic content area who will be able to provide even more in-depth mentoring including information about potential career, internship, and graduate school opportunities as well as help students navigate the courses required for a degree in their specific major.

### **How will faculty and staff be involved?**

Faculty and staff will be the facilitators of each of the enhanced services provided to students. They will serve as advisors, staff study tables, provide early alert information, engage in course redesign, teach sections of ASU 1101, and provide academic and student support services to students determined to be at risk. Faculty and staff engaged in these functions will be provided with professional development opportunities with topics ranging from effective advising strategies to providing high-quality instruction to assessment and relationship building.

### **Where can I get more information about the QEP?**

Check out our [website](#) for ongoing information and updates about the QEP, or contact QEP Director Dr. Joy Hamm at [joy.hamm@asurams.edu](mailto:joy.hamm@asurams.edu).

### **When will we know if our QEP is acceptable?**

The on-site committee, which is comprised of fellow professionals, will assess the instructional strengths and weaknesses of the QEP. Throughout the visit, which will be held **March 8-11, 2021 at Albany State University**, committee members will review the data and carry out interviews to assess the QEP, present proposals to enhance QEP, and determine whether the institution is in compliance with the **Principles of Accreditation**. The committee recommends written opinion to the institution, creates an unanimity on its conclusions, and finalizes the draft

report. Lastly, the committee gives an oral summary of the exit report presented to the President and invited institutional administrators on the final day of the official visit.

### **What happens during the On-Site Committee Review Team Visit?**

On March 8 – March 11, 2020, ASU will host a team of external reviewers who are also peers, working at colleges and universities in the SACSCOC region. Day one, of the four-day visit, is Review Team visits to off-site instructional locations. Day two focuses on campus presentation on QEP and any interviews the Review Team may request with faculty, staff, and administrators regarding compliance issues noted in the Focused Report. On day three, interviews as requested by Review Team will be conducted with students, staff, and administrators to discuss campus buy-in and feasibility of the QEP. There may be interviews scheduled at the last minute, but they are expected to occur on the afternoon of March 9 and throughout the day on March 10. The final day is Exit Conference. The Exit Conference is designed as a dialogue between two small groups of individuals – the On-Site Committee Review Team and the institution’s leadership. Prior to the Exit Conference, the Review Team and SACSCOC staff representative meet with the President to preview the Review Team findings. At the Exit Conference, the Review Team reports any recommendations that have been written and shares additional observations about the institution in general and the Quality Enhancement Plan in particular.