

## **SACS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES: OVERVIEW OF SELF-STUDY PROGRAM**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is one of six private, nonprofit, voluntary regional accrediting associations established for the purpose of improving education in colleges and schools through a process of evaluating institutions against a set of criteria. The Southern Association is comprised of the Commission on Colleges and two other Commissions—the Commission on Secondary Schools and the Commission on Elementary Schools. The Commission on Colleges is the recognized regional body which accredits institutions awarding associate, baccalaureate, master's, specialist's or doctoral degrees in the eleven southern states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia and in Latin America.

The accrediting standards used by the Commissions on Colleges make up the *Criteria for Accreditation*. The *Criteria* is approved by the membership and provides consistent guidelines to peers as they evaluate institutions.

A key component in the accreditation process is the self-study. Each institution applying for initial, continuing, or renewed accreditation is required to conduct a comprehensive study of its purpose, programs, and services. At the culmination of the self-study, the Commission on Colleges sends a committee of peers to the campus to assess the educational strengths and weaknesses of the institution as outlined in the self-study, to evaluate the institution's effectiveness in reaching its stated goals and in complying with the *Criteria*, and to consult with the institution on issues important to its advancement. The committee develops a consensus of its findings and completes a formal written report.

### **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND BENEFITS OF THE ASU SELF-STUDY**

The general goals of the self-study program emphasize both the process and the product. The self-study should provide an institution with:

- A basis for affirming or revising the institution's statement of purpose.
- The re-evaluation of institutional goals within the context of its purpose.
- An identification of significant institutional issues, strengths and weaknesses, and strategies for addressing concerns raised in the self-study.
- An improved/strengthened process for evaluating the institutions effectiveness.
- A comprehensive report and supporting documents to be used by the institution as part of its planning and by a visiting committee during its review of the institution.
- An assessment of the extent to which the institution meets or exceeds the *Criteria for Accreditation*.
- Involvement in and development of an enhanced sense of cohesiveness among all members of

the institutional community.

While the self-study process is demanding and requires substantial commitment of time, energy, and resources, the benefits are significant. The self-study:

- Sharpens the focus of the institutions purpose and clarifies its goals.

- Creates a clear understanding for the institution's constituencies of the future direction of the institution.

- Provides a structured and constructive framework within which to engage in self -analysis for the purpose of identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses.

- Provides an opportunity to identify the critical issues and concerns facing the institution, and to generate new or improved approaches to these issues.

- Increases efficiency and productivity of the operational units of the institution.

- Strengthens institutional research.

- Provides an opportunity for a wide-range of faculty, staff, and constituent involvement in development.

- Provides the opportunity to identify, develop, and refine leadership skills of key personnel.

- Strengthens the appreciation for and understanding of the institution.

- Establishes confidence in and credibility of the institution and its programs among the members of the academy, various governmental and private agencies, and the public at large.

- Culminates in an internal report containing recommendations which are useful to the future development of the institution.