

# REFLECTIONS ON KSU'S COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

## What Worked and What Disappointed in the Class of 2007

### Keys to a Successful Compliance Certification Review

1. **KSU capitalized on the perspective of its experienced SACS-COC peer evaluators as to how compliance would be validated by the review committees. Collectively, they interpreted the Commission's expectations for compliance well.**
2. **KSU's reports were expressed in the editor's single and persuasive voice, were well written, and were thoroughly documented.**
3. **All justifications (almost) for compliance certification were designed to address every key phrase of each accreditation requirement in a literal and complete manner.**
4. **Over 7 gigabytes of supporting documentation were easily accessed, quickly retrievable, and reliably available on KSU's Web site and through active links in the Compliance Certification.**
5. **Strong presidential involvement and leadership in preparing for KSU's highly successful off-site and on-site reviews were invaluable.**
6. **KSU's extensive groundwork in comprehensive program review, student learning outcomes assessment and strategic change management over the past decade paid great dividends in demonstrating compliance in institutional effectiveness.**
7. **A low number of manageable recommendations were received from the Off-Site Committee and were responded to satisfactorily in the Focused Report, which paved the way for the On-Site Committee's review to focus on the QEP, which received high praise.**

### Disappointments Encountered

1. **More often than not, colleagues did not complete their assigned reports in a timely or acceptable manner, necessitating substantial supplemental research and writing by the reports editor. (The editor proclaimed TGFW – Thank God for Web sites.)**
2. **Some Off-Site Committee recommendations appeared to be nit-picking or hair-splitting in their lack of important substance, especially in the standards involving faculty credentials and library resources.**
3. **The lack of definitive direction as to what constitutes reportable substantive change and the specific conditions under which a prospectus or site visit would be required was frustrating.**

### Stressful Unexpected Developments

1. **Having the university's previous president announce her retirement as reaffirmation preparations got underway and having the new president come on board only a couple of months before the Compliance Assurance was due created unexpected challenges for reaffirmation preparations.**
2. **The immediate application of several changes to the *Principles* in January 2007 after their approval in December 2006 created pressure to produce unexpected last-minute report supplements between KSU's Off-Site and On-Site Committee reviews.**

## KEY DIMENSIONS OF A STRONG QEP

### Notable Lessons Learned From Kennesaw State University's Reaffirmation Experience, Class of 2007

1. **Initiating work on the QEP two years ahead of its deadline for submission and limiting topic selection to six months so that 18 months could be devoted to developing and drafting a sufficiently comprehensive, detailed, and operational QEP proved to be a necessary time frame for KSU's completion of a strong Plan.**
2. **Selecting a QEP topic that is central to the university's mission and builds upon the university's recognized strengths, ongoing assessments and continuing strategic priorities for the improvement of student learning was a key for success.**
3. **Articulating clear and comprehensive definitions of terms and statements of purpose, operational goals, and student learning outcomes for the QEP was vital for an acceptable focus and for establishing the foundation upon which action plans, timetables, responsibilities, and assessment strategies were subsequently developed.**
4. **Engaging the university president, the entire president's cabinet, and global learning coordinators for every college in the adoption and implementation of specific operational goals for the QEP demonstrated broad-based participation.**
5. **Outlining detailed action plans, timelines, responsibilities and resource requirements for each of the QEP's ten operational goals and documenting initial steps taken affirmed institutional capability to fully implement the Plan.**
6. **Outlining multi-dimensional assessment strategies for the next five years for each of the QEP's ten operational goals that included internal, external, formative, summative, qualitative and quantitative methods as well as references to the use of results of past institutional assessments, underscored the institution's commitment to continuous improvement of student learning.**
7. **Organizing and writing up the QEP in ways that closely tracked the Commission's suggested evaluation criteria so that compliance was thoroughly addressed and readily validated by the visiting team was a key for minimizing recommendations. (COC evaluation criteria and the reaffirmation report form were changed in 2007.)**
8. **Capitalizing on the expertise and consultative functions of the Lead QEP Evaluator and the visiting committee for affirmation and confirmation of proposed innovations precipitated subsequent improvements of the Plan.**

See KSU's Quality Enhancement Plan, Reaffirmation Committee Report and Institutional Response at <http://sacs.kennesaw.edu>

## INTERPRET REQUIREMENTS LITERALLY AND COMPLETELY

### Advice from KSU's Experienced Peer Evaluator

**As a general rule, success in demonstrating compliance with a SACS-COC accreditation requirement typically involves responding adequately to all key phrases embedded in the wording of the requirement.**

Crafting responses that thoroughly address the literal interpretation of all key words and phrases is vital. This is especially important in the institutional effectiveness requirements since multiple “must statements” from the Commission’s previous *Criteria for Accreditation* were combined and consolidated into each IE requirement in the current *Principles of Accreditation*. For example, **Core Requirement 2.5** reads as follows:

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. (**Institutional Effectiveness**)

The key words and phrases that typically must be interpreted literally and addressed satisfactorily are:

1. “the institution engages”; “institution-wide”; “institutional quality”; “institution is accomplishing.” These key words emphasize an expectation that **the institution is the primary focal point for a case statement on compliance**. The Commission’s executive summary of the changes in CR 2.5 from the 2004 edition to the 2007 edition of the *Principles* (COC/SACS, 2007) stated, “The revised requirement on institutional effectiveness places the emphasis on ‘institutional’ mission, goals, outcomes, and quality rather than programs and services (p 1).”
2. “ongoing”; “integrated”; “continuing improvement”; “effectively accomplishing.” These key words set expectations for the description of **planning and evaluation processes that are currently active and continuous** rather than static or single occurrences. The importance of a multi-year perspective on institutional planning, evaluation, and improvement is implied.
3. “planning and evaluation processes that 1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals and outcomes...and 3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.” These phrases point to a clear and strong expectation for evidence of the **systematic review of institutional mission, institutional goals, and institutional accomplishments consistent with mission and goals**.
4. “planning and evaluation processes that result in continuing improvement in institutional quality.” This key phrase is often associated with the concept of “closing the loop” in assessment. **Documented use of the results of institutional planning and evaluation to achieve institutional improvements and quality enhancement** is expected.

# DEMONSTRATING INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

## Key Factors in Kennesaw State University's Success

KSU's success in demonstrating compliance with institutional effectiveness requirements to the Off-Site Committee was attributable to a number of key factors in the documentation of the planning, evaluation, and improvement of what **matters most** to the institution as a whole (CR 2.5) and to its educational programs and support services units (CS 3.3.1). What matters most at KSU are multiple methods of planning and evaluation that lead to meaningful, major, macro-level, multi-year, mission-driven improvements of the institution as a whole as well as its educational programs and support services.

### **1) Capturing the Multi-Year, Decade-Long History of Institutional Planning, Evaluation, and Improvement**

The centerpiece of KSU's Compliance Certification Report for CR 2.5 was a detailed and extensively documented ten-year review of intensive, mission-driven planning and evaluation initiatives and achievements. Few decades in the history of KSU have involved as much strategic planning and transformational change as the period from 1995 to 2005.

### **2) Capitalizing on a Major Membership in a Dynamic University System That is Centrally Driven by Planning, Evaluation and Improvement**

KSU must take its lead in mission development and strategic planning from the Chancellor and the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. Comprehensive statewide planning and institutional reforms, impacting all members of the University System of Georgia, have significantly shaped KSU's mission as well as its planning, evaluation, and improvement processes throughout the past decade.

### **3) Honoring Multiple Methods of Effective Institutional Planning, Evaluation, and Improvement**

Core Requirement 2.5 wisely refers to planning and evaluation processes in plural terms. The University System and its member institutions use many different planning and evaluation processes to achieve System and institutional goals.

### **4) Emphasizing Macro-Level Institutional Planning, Evaluation, and Improvement**

Throughout the past decade, achieving mission-driven strategic goals for major transformational changes were more important than building and managing uniform, bureaucratic planning processes that maintain or modestly improve institutional operations. Strategic priorities in the University System of Georgia and at KSU focused on a number of extremely complex and challenging transformational initiatives that often took many years to plan, fully implement, and fine tune.

**5) Highlighting Mission-Driven Continuous Improvement and Accomplishments**

Annual Reports of Institutional Progress documented in detail the many ways that the university had improved and grown in the accomplishment of its mission. Key elements of KSU's official mission statement and the notable improvements that had been achieved over the past ten years in support of that mission were systematically analyzed and reviewed.

**6) Articulating the Institution's Expected Outcomes for Educational Programs and Support Services**

KSU identified six major expected outcomes that mattered most for its educational programs and support services. Assessment of KSU's programs and support services were reported in the context of those expected outcomes. How assessment results were used for improvement was systematically analyzed and documented.

**7) Assessing Student Learning Outcomes Separately from Program Outcomes – KSU's Dual Assessment Tracks**

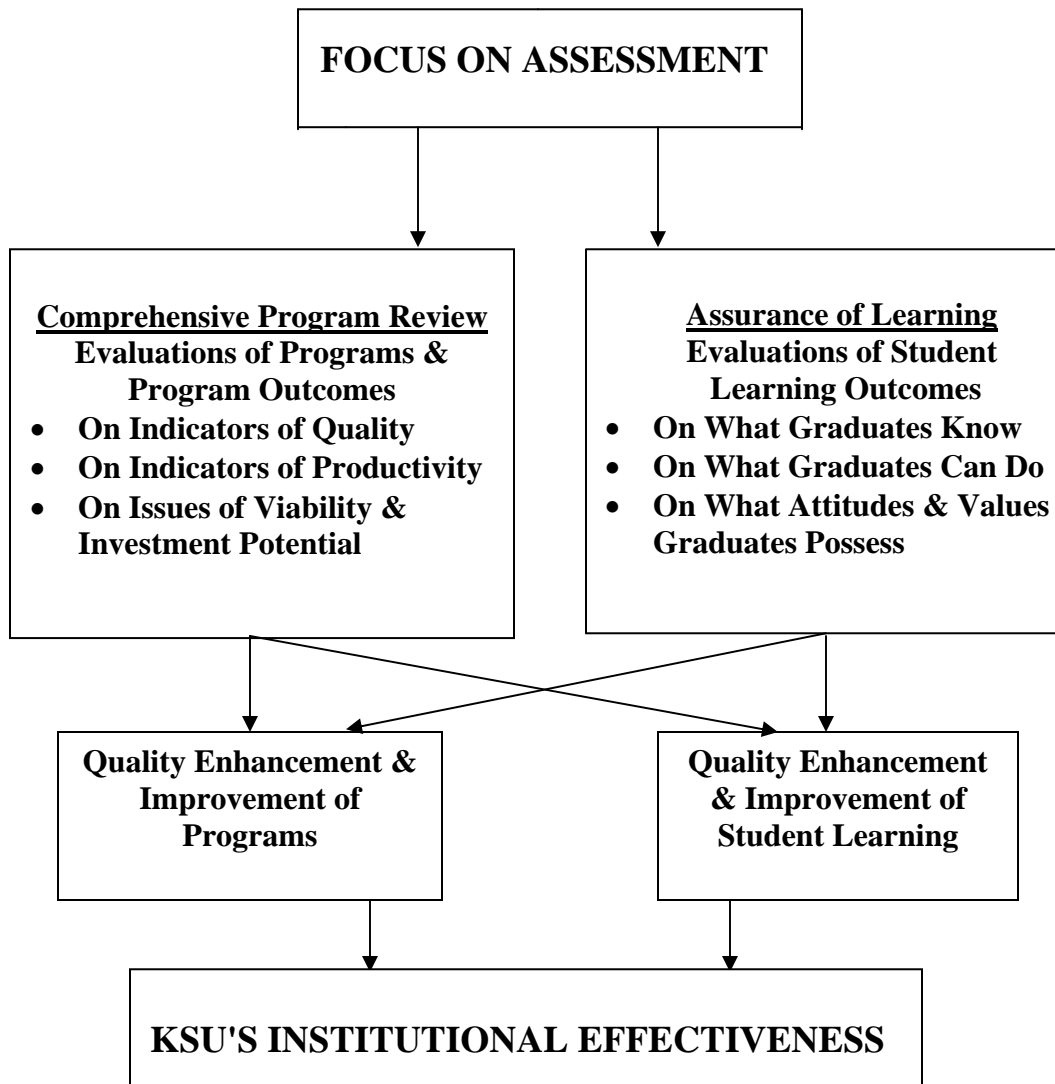
KSU developed and maintains parallel systems to assess program outcomes and student learning outcomes. This dual focus helps to distinguish and highlight the differences between program and student learning outcomes and allows the latter to be a focal point of in-depth analysis and improvement rather than be minimized under a larger umbrella of comprehensive program review. That dual focus is presented in the attached graphic.

**8) Affirming that Quality Enhancement is What Matters Most**

The subtitle of the *Principles of Accreditation* is *Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. The enhancement of student learning and the enhancement of the quality of an institution's programs and services are core values of institutional accreditation in the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools. Focusing the description of KSU's planning, evaluation, and improvement processes on meaningful, mission-driven, macro-level, multi-year improvements that matter most helped to ensure that quality enhancement was achieved by the university and validated by its peers.

**See KSU's Compliance Assurance Report and Off-Site Committee Report at <http://sacs.kennesaw.edu>**

**Kennesaw State University's  
Dual Assessment Focus  
in the Quest for Quality Enhancement**



# DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN PROGRAM & LEARNING OUTCOMES

## Become Familiar with the National Conversations and Literature

Substantial ambiguity exists in the Commission’s guidance for assessing “program outcomes” and “learning outcomes” in CS 3.3.1 (and CS 3.5.1). Having familiarity with ongoing national conversations and the professional literature about the importance of student learning outcomes and how they differ from the evaluations of program outcomes can be vitally important to demonstrating compliance with CS 3.3.1. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006), the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (2003), and New England Association of College and Schools (2005) provide explicit directions about expectations for assessing and improving student learning outcomes. CHEA (2003), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, adopted an advisory statement to accreditors and institutions which stated:

“student learning outcomes are properly defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences,” and that program effectiveness is different in that it embraces “various kinds of behavioral outcomes for students that go beyond learning” and “includes important organizational capacities...that can enable it to continue to fulfill its purposes such as an adequate resources base and organizational structure, as well as mechanisms to evaluate its own performance to respond to changing conditions and improve overall performance.” (pp 5-6)

Ambiguity also exists between the terms, “learning outcomes” and “student learning outcomes.” The AAHE Assessment Forum’s 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes (1996) distinguished between the assessment of “student learning outcomes” that focus on where students “end up” at the completion of an educational program and the assessment of “learning outcomes” that occur along the way, typically in individual courses.

KSU distinguished program outcomes from student learning outcomes as follows:

### KSU’s Dual Focus on Outcomes Assessment

<b>Program Outcomes</b>	<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b>
The program is the unit of analysis	The graduating student is the unit of analysis
Measures are taken and analyzed on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicators of Program Quality</li> <li>• Indicators of Program Productivity</li> <li>• Indicators of Program Viability</li> </ul>	Measures are taken and analyzed on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What Graduating Students Know (Knowledge)</li> <li>• What Graduating Students Can Do (Skills)</li> <li>• What Graduating Students are Like (Attitudes and Professional Values)</li> </ul>
Indicators can include student learning outcomes but emphasize other factors	
a.k.a.: Comprehensive Program Review Program Evaluation	a.k.a.: Learning Outcomes Assessment Assurance of Learning

## References

AAHE Assessment Forum. (1996, July). 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning. Retrieved October 5, 2007 from the Texas Christian University Web site: <http://www.assessment.tcu.edu/assessment/aahe.pdf>

Council for Higher Education Accreditation, CHEA. (2003, September). Statement of Mutual Responsibilities for Student Learning Outcomes: Accreditation, Institutions and Programs. Retrieved October 5, 2007 from the CHEA Web site: <http://www.chea.org/pdf/StmntStudentLearningOutcomes9-03.pdf>

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2006) Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. Retrieved October 5, 2007 at their Web site: <http://www.msache.org/publications/CHX06060320124919.pdf>

New England Association of Schools and Colleges. (2005) Standards for Accreditation. Retrieved October 5, 2007 from their Web site: [http://www.neasc.org/cihe/standards\\_for\\_accreditation\\_2005.pdf](http://www.neasc.org/cihe/standards_for_accreditation_2005.pdf)

North Central Association Higher Learning Commission. (2003, October) Handbook of Accreditation. Retrieved October 5, 2007 from their Web site: <http://www.ncahlc.org/download/Handbook03.pdf>

# GLOBAL LEARNING FOR ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP

## QEP Executive Summary for Kennesaw State University

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Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship is a focused five-year plan of central importance to Kennesaw State's mission and strategic plan as a progressive and comprehensive metropolitan university. The QEP's purpose is to raise global learning to the top tier of KSU's educational priorities and student learning outcomes. A comprehensive set of ten goals, related action plans, resource allocations, and administrative assignments have been established to ensure the institution's capability to successfully initiate and fully implement the Plan. These goals cluster into three supporting pillars of expected improvement, including the systematic tracking of progress and goal attainment, expanding global learning opportunities and investments, and increasing campus-wide participation in global learning. The success of the QEP is defined as achievement of those ten goals in support of the QEP's overall purpose. Three global learning outcomes articulate and define the QEP's expected expansion of global perspectives, intercultural engagement skills, and global citizenship attitudes for graduating students. Multifaceted assessments have been outlined to provide internal and external, as well as formative and summative, evaluations of progress and success in achieving each of the QEP's ten goals and its overall purpose, including the gathering of evidence of the improvement of global learning outcomes. Broad-based involvement of the campus community was engaged in topic selection for the QEP in 2005 and the development of the Plan in 2006, and will continue to be engaged throughout the QEP's implementation from 2007 to 2012. Distinctive features of the QEP include the continuation of KSU's twenty-year track record of achievements and advances in internationalization, including national involvement in ACE's Global Learning for All initiative; exceptional Presidential Cabinet-led leadership; appointment of a Global Learning Coordinator in each college as well as in the co-curricular student support units; a broad-based and progressive educational model for global learning that extends beyond the traditional focus on study abroad and foreign language acquisition; a global engagement student activities fee that supplements institutional investments in global learning; a "Get Global" marketing campaign; and plans for formal recognition and certification of a student's global engagement competencies.

# REAFFIRMATION RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

<http://sacs.kennesaw.edu>

KSU's SACS Accreditation Web site containing all reaffirmation reports and evaluations as well as ongoing substantive change reports

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KSU's Accreditation Liaison and reaffirmation reports editor; served on or chaired over two dozen visiting committees for the Commission and as a reader for C&R; previously KSU's chief academic officer for 16 years; KSU's institutional effectiveness coordinator.

Related "Professional Presentations" posted at <http://vic.kennesaw.edu>

Rugg, E. (2008, June) **Insights and Lessons from Kennesaw State University's Reaffirmation in 2007**. Presented at SACS-COC 2008 Orientation Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Rugg, E., Sutton, S., & Morris, B. (2008, May) **Multiple Perspectives on Utilizing Institutional Reaccreditation to Improve Global Learning**. Presented at the Annual Conference of NAFSA, Washington, D.C.

Rugg, E., Papp, D., Adebayo, A., & Sutton, S. (2007, December) **Key Dimensions of a Strong QEP**. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools/Commission on Colleges, New Orleans, LA.

Rugg, E. & Papp, D. (2007, December). **Documenting What Matters Most for Institutional Effectiveness**. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools/Commission on Colleges, New Orleans, LA.

Bowe, E. & Rugg, E. (2007, December). **Lessons Learned in Building a Comprehensive Virtual Documents Room**. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools/Commission on Colleges, New Orleans, LA.

Rugg, E. (2007, October). **M&M's of Institutional Effectiveness Compliance**. Presented at the Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research, Little Rock, AR.