Background

For immediate use

SACS reaccreditation provides opportunities to enhance learning

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill continues preparing for reaffirmation of its accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). These activities will culminate in a campus visit April 11-13 by a committee with members from other public universities led by University of Georgia President Michael Adams.

Chancellor James Moeser says that the reaccreditation process demonstrates the university’s accountability to the people of North Carolina and beyond.

SACS is the regional accrediting body. SACS requires all colleges and universities to undergo an accreditation review every 10 years. Campuses must demonstrate compliance with core requirements and comprehensive standards to earn reaccreditation. The current process emphasizes documenting improvements in the quality of the student learning experience. SACS requires two reports, which UNC began working on in 2004.

The first is a compliance review, which required UNC to provide detailed responses to 80 different standards for good practices across nine different areas of campus operations.

The second report is a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which requires the development of a plan to enhance educational quality and improve learning for all students in a targeted area. A campus-wide process guided the decision to select "Making Critical Connections" as the QEP. This move was endorsed by the academic, faculty, staff, and student leadership and was vetted last fall in campus forums.

The QEP’s focus is on implementing the new general education curriculum – scheduled to begin in fall 2006 – as well as internationalizing the student learning experience, and enhancing research efforts by undergraduates. University officials say these proposed enhancements demonstrate a commitment to interdisciplinary work, support for diversity, reliance on ethical behavior, and commitment to public engagement. Another objective is to extend the positive influence of honor and integrity on the teaching and learning process to student involvement in research and discovery both on and off campus.

Many campuses developing QEPs focus on a single topic. As a major research university, Chapel Hill chose to take a sweeping look at the full range of student learning in classrooms, research laboratories, and through public service initiatives involving students, faculty and staff.

Highlights of the proposed QEP include:
In the curriculum:

- Launching an innovative scheduling alternative called a "Maymester." A group of undergraduates could spend focused time – perhaps three weeks – studying with faculty on or off campus. Possibilities include travel to Chile, where UNC partners in the Southern Observatory for Astrophysical Research Telescope. "Maymester" already has proven to be especially attractive to students interested in earning academic credit early during the summer break.
- Creating a "Connections Center" on campus that would foster the ability of faculty and students to connect with the many opportunities for learning that occur daily throughout the campus, region, state, nation, and world.

In research:

- Establishing a series of linked courses through "Research Tracks" stretching across disciplines to introduce students to unsolved problems, help them understand multiple forms of inquiry, and enable them to conduct original work.
- Increasing courses in which students carry out original research projects, the number of qualified mentors for undergraduate students interested in research, and creating four new term-based "Research Professorships," one in each division of the College of Arts and Sciences.

In the International arena:

- Improving the infrastructure for international activities, which will, in turn, increase support for international research.
- Embedding internationalization as deeply as possible into the curriculum.

"Making Critical Connections" will help advance progress toward the university’s overall strategic goals and objectives. It is fully integrated with ongoing assessment processes, including the academic plan and "Measures of Excellence" developed with the Board of Trustees. Both the compliance report and the Quality Enhancement Plan have been submitted to the SACS review team. The April visit will determine the next steps toward formal reaccreditation and launching the QEP. If approved, the university would be committed to the QEP for at least five years. The expectation is that many facets of it will remain important long into the future.

Carolina’s reaffirmation effort is being coordinated by a leadership team: Chancellor James Moeser, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Robert Shelton, Associate Provost for International Affairs Peter Coclanis, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Nancy Suttenfield, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Peggy Jablonski, Bobbi Owen, professor and senior associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, Lynn Williford, assistant provost and director of institutional research, Business Professor Bob Adler, Kerry Kilpatrick, professor and associate dean in the School of Public Health, Biology Professor Mark Peifer, and student representative James Allred.

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Web link: [www.unc.edu/inst_res/SACS/sacs.html](http://www.unc.edu/inst_res/SACS/sacs.html)

Contact: Mike McFarland, (919) 962-8593, mike_mcfarland@unc.edu