

Our Current Self-Study Status

During the Spring 2001 Semester, nine self-study committees composed of over one hundred faculty, staff, and students gathered data concerning all divisions, departments, and units of the College. The data consist of facts about everything from why an institution of higher learning has a member of the cuckoo family as its mascot to what the President has for lunch. Well, maybe not, but it does contain a fairly complete picture of how Dalton State College functions to carry out its mission.

Although data collection is not completed, a wealth of data was collected, and some analysis and evaluation was done. These things, however, are just the first step toward a full self-study and self-evaluation by the College. All subcommittees must now analyze the data to be certain that every division, department, and unit in the College meets the criteria, expressed as **must** and **should** statements in the *1998 Criteria for Accreditation*, published by the SACS Commission on Colleges (COC). Each of the nine principal committees must be certain that its subcommittee reports are complete, comprehensive, and accurately evaluated. The Self-Study General Editor, assisted by the principal committee editors, must see that all reports are formatted correctly; that grammar, spelling, and punctuation are correct; and that the entire report is in the same voice, appropriate for its subject and audience.

The Must-Statement Auditor will analyze the report to determine that the College has satisfied and fully documented every applicable **must** and **should** statement in the *Criteria for Accreditation*, which contains over 400 **must** statements. When the Auditor is satisfied, the

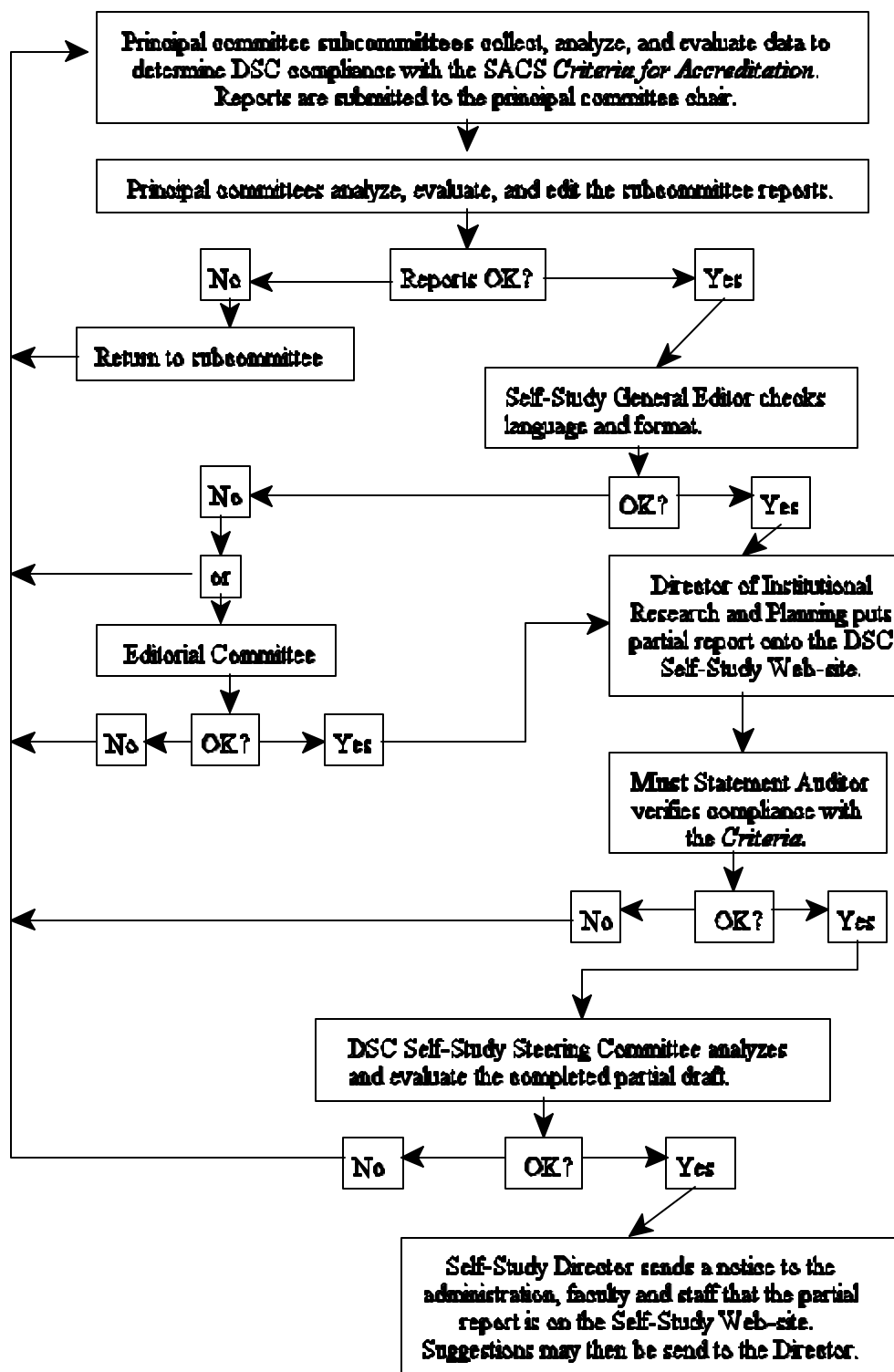
Self-Study Steering Committee will look over the completed report to fine-tune it before publication.

The flow chart below provides a more complete picture of the process. All of us who work for the College have roles in the Self-Study, whether as committee members or as providers of information and solvers of problems; and the cooperation of all will be necessary to do the kind of job that will produce reaffirmation of DSC's accreditation without exceptions or recommendations imposed by the SACS Visiting Committee.

The procedure requires a considerable amount of time to complete because thorough data collection and analysis is complicated, and because many problems have been and will be encountered. This explains why the Self-Study kicked off in February of 2001 to begin preparation for the arrival of the SACS Visiting Committee in late March of 2003. So far, in the less than one full semester that we have been actively engaged in organizing committees and collecting data, we are right on schedule. By November of this year, completed drafts of the *Self-Study Report* will begin to appear on the DSC Self-Study Web-site. When they do, all faculty, staff, and students may read them and offer recommendations and suggestions. By April 15, 2002, the completed drafts of all nine principal committees will be on the web-site (see "Due Dates for Completed Drafts," page 3). The Steering Committee will then begin its final review, and by November 2002 work can begin on the addenda which will contain updates on action taken to clear self-study recommendations and current facts such as changes in or additions to programs and staffing.

Working together to assure compliance with the SACS *Criteria*, we will be improving the College as well as assuring ourselves of an excellent report from the SACS Visiting Committee and reaffirmation of accreditation from the Commission on Colleges.

Dalton State College Self-Study Procedure Flow Chart



When all subcommittee reports from all principal committees have been through the above process, the entire *Self-Study Report* will be complete, and the Steering Committee will review it for unity and thoroughness. When the Steering Committee approves the complete *Report*, the Director will notify the President. Upon the President's approval, the *Report* will be published.

Due Dates for Completed Drafts 2001-2002

Nov. 5	Student Development Services
Nov. 19	Library, Educational Support Services, Information Technology Resources
Dec. 3	Faculty, and Consortial and Contractual Agreements
Dec. 14	Educational Program, General Requirements, and Undergraduate Programs
Jan. 25	Organization and Administration and Institutional Advancement
Feb. 15	Financial Resources
Mar. 1	Physical Resources
Mar. 16	Institutional Effectiveness
April 1	Purpose, Philosophy, and Principles

What's the Big Deal about Accreditation?

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) consists of some 780 colleges and universities. Accreditation by SACS provides a member institution like Dalton State College with recognition that it meets certain quality standards determined by the combined membership of the Association. Being accredited assures students, parents, and employers that a college's programs meet at least these minimum standards, which guarantee good administrative practices, student support, qualified faculty, etc.

Every ten years a member college must conduct a self-study to determine its compliance with the criteria for accreditation and must receive a visit from a SACS Visiting Committee (faculty and staff from peer institutions), who will

inspect the college and report to the COC. Institutions found out of compliance with the criteria may receive any of three sanctions - a notice, a warning, or probation - or may lose accreditation altogether. A notice is a short-term confidential sanction, but both warning and probation sanctions, which include denial of reaffirmation of accreditation, are public and may continue for up to two years.

Not being accredited means loss of government grants and loans for students, loss of the ability to transfer course credits, and loss of credibility with employers, hence loss of students. That's the big deal about accreditation and the reason why the DSC Self-Study is so important.

Matters of Non-Compliance

Although it is difficult to tolerate the scrutiny, even by one's peers, that goes with a self-study, we should keep in mind that the DSC Self-Study Program is for the purpose of making the college a better place for students to obtain an education as well as a better place for us to work. We are, of course, additionally motivated by the need to retain SACS accreditation. But this is a *self-study*, planned and carried out by DSC faculty, staff, and students. No one involved is employed by SACS.

The Self-Study Program applies the SACS *Criteria* that **must be met** for reaffirmation of accreditation to the College's operations and reports compliance or noncompliance. And as we investigate what we do and how we do it, we are, naturally, discovering some problems. Several of the principal committees have already encountered cases of non-compliance with the criteria, some of which concern faculty credentials and institutional effectiveness programs. The committees issue notices of noncompliance to the appropriate chairpersons or directors when they find such conditions. These notices are not intended to criticize anyone or anyone's work. They simply report conditions that appear to need correction in order to satisfy SACS criteria.

Where the committees find what they perceive to be problems but not cases of non-compliance, they may issue a notice of committee concern and may include a suggestion or a

proposal in the Self-Study Report. Where exceptional performance and/or results are discovered, the committees may include commendations in the Self-Study Report.

The above reports absolutely must be issued and the problems addressed if we are to be certain that the SACS Visiting Committee cannot find us noncompliant with the conditions of eligibility. The keys to receiving a good report will be cooperation and coordination.

SACS and Institutional Effectiveness

Since the 1993 SACS visit to our college, the SACS Commission on Colleges has become extremely interested in the amount of attention its member colleges give to institutional effectiveness. Section III of the *1998 Criteria for Accreditation* says, "The concept of institutional effectiveness is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation and is central to institutional programs and operations."

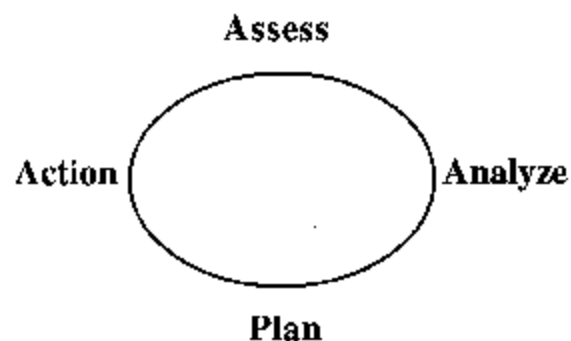
What does this mean? Often members of the college community interpret institutional effectiveness as applying only to the academic preparation of students, the effective and efficient delivery of quality education. That, of course, is included in the term's meaning; however, learning must take place in a safe, secure, and clean environment well equipped with the necessary tools: computers, library facilities, books and supplies, financial aid etc.

This means that institutional effectiveness is a concern for everyone who works for Dalton State College, no matter what the job, and that all units—academic divisions and departments, student support services, enrollment services, plant maintenance, safety and security, food service, literally every operation—must have institutional effectiveness plans and the documentation to prove that these plans are being used to improve their ability to carry out the College's mission.

Again from the *Criteria*. "Each member institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness by employing a comprehensive

system of planning and evaluation in all major aspects of the institution."

The basic model for organizing institutional effectiveness, for the College, for the division, for the department, and for the individual, is to assess the work being done and its results; to analyze those results based upon how well they meet the goals established to carry out the unit's and the College's missions; to plan action to improve the results; and to reassess the work and the results. The means of assessing and documenting will, of course, vary according to the unit and the individual. A diagram illustrating this cycle is below.



Need Help? **Want to know more?**

Dr. Henry Codjoe, Director of Institutional Research and Planning, provides assistance with institutional effectiveness programs. A DSC Self-Study committee chaired by Ms. Laura Rose, who is also Chair of the standing Institutional Effectiveness Committee, has the responsibility for determining the compliance of all units of the College with Section III of the *SACS Criteria*. Questions about institutional effectiveness should be directed to Dr. Codjoe or Ms. Rose.

Questions about other DSC Self-Study matters should be directed to Dr. Frank Beesley.