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## **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes: the quality enhancement plan**

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# Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes: the quality enhancement plan

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## I. Introduction: The Perennial Question

One of the perennial questions in higher education, whether it be in American, European, Asian, or other institutions of higher learning around the globe is: How do we demonstrate that we, in fact, do what we say we do? This is a question with which administrators and faculty have grappled for more than a quarter century. As Alexander W. Astin stated in 1993 in the preface to his seminal work, “For the past twenty five years I have been more or less continually engaged in assessment activities in the field of higher education.” Astin’s 1993 statement is as relevant in 2009 as when he made it because higher education continues to grapple with the question. Consider, for example, such recent works on the subject as Herson, et al. (2004) and Schwartz and Associates (2009). Other recent publications could be cited as illustrative examples: Schuetze (2008) and Yamada (2008). Yet, of such import is this question that entire academic journals, for example *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, are devoted to works by scholars who through their research continue to endeavor to answer it.

This paper has as its purpose description and discussion of one of the latest efforts in the United States to answer the question. It will present efforts by one regional association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges, to incorporate assessment and evaluation into the accreditation process. First to be presented will be a review of the orthodox SACS approach to assessment and evaluation, that is efforts dating back at least to the mid-eighties which required institutions of higher learning to engage in assessment and evaluation to gain accreditation or to have their accreditation reaffirmed once having gained it. These efforts required institutions of higher learning to engage in what was termed Institutional Effectiveness. Second, this paper will examine the latest attempt by SACS to answer the question: How does higher education demonstrate how it does in fact do what it says it does? This latest effort involved the development of a new paradigm of assessment—the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). It required all institutions to develop and implement detailed strategies for the measurement of student learning outcomes. The QEP will be defined, the accreditation core requirement addressing its development will be discussed, and finally several examples of QEPS that have been developed at a research university, a comprehensive university, a community college, at a church-affiliated university, and a private, women’s liberal arts college will be presented. The paper concludes with some analysis of the pros and cons of this new paradigm.

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## II. Institutional Effectiveness: The Orthodox Approach to Assessment

Regional accrediting associations in the United States began their journey into assessment and evaluation following the lead of such institutions as Alverno College and Southeast Missouri State College. In the Southeast Region of the United States, the SACS Commission on Colleges initiated its requirement of Institutional Effectiveness through the requirements of Comprehensive Standard 3.3. The Standard states:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results of the following areas:

- educational programs to include learning outcomes
- administrative support services
- education support services
- research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate.

Compliance with this standard required institutions to assess every functional area of the enterprise and involve all members of the university community, faculty, administrators, students, and staff in the process. All types of institutions, from flagship research universities to community colleges, from private liberal arts colleges to church-affiliated institutions, all had to develop processes and mechanisms of assessment to comply with this standard. Staff positions devoted to data collection, analysis, and reporting were required. A typical institutional arrangement would consist of an office staffed by a Director of Institutional Effectiveness and requisite support staff to process the data and perform required reporting commensurate with the institution's role and mission. Large institutions with tens of thousands of students would obviously require much larger staffs than small institutions with a few thousand or hundred students. Regardless of institution size and mission, the process of complying with institutional effectiveness was the same. Institutions also typically have an Institutional Effectiveness Council or Committee composed of faculty, administrators, and staff who are responsible for reviewing Institutional Effectiveness reports that are completed by all the units and subunits within the institution. Table 1 presents a typical data collection form used by institutions in compiling their institutional effectiveness reports.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3 requires that every unit or subunit within the institution on an annual basis identify its goals, usually a limited number of two to three are recommended, and objectives, identify the expected outcomes of those goals, describe the methods of assessing successful accomplishment of the goals and objectives, and finally report the manner in which the results obtained from the assessment process are used for continuous improvement of the unit or subunits' mission. Institutional Effectiveness reports are completed annually for each academic program, for library services, for the general education core, and other activities such as student recruitment, advisement, and counseling. All administrative units, to include, finance, administration, management information systems, instructional technology, student housing,

**Table 1. Institutional Effectiveness and Outcomes Assessment Report\***

Unit or Subunit:	Submitted by :
Supervisor Review:	Date:
<u>Purpose Statement:</u>	
<u>Program/Operational Goal/Student Learning Outcome</u>	
Either operational, unit, program goal, or student learning outcomes. Goals are broad and generally do not change over time. Goal statements describe intended outcomes for students/graduates of the program in very general terms. Academic units must submit goals related to student learning outcomes.	
<u>Mission Goal Number</u>	
Where does the above fit into one or more of the University goals of the Mission?	
<u>Objectives(s)</u>	
List objectives-objectives are much more specific and change over time. These need to use terms and statements that describe the intended outcomes in measureable terms. The objective should illustrate a path towards meeting the goal.	
<u>Expected Results and Assessment Methods</u>	
Expected results must contain a number/percent.	
<u>Assessment Methods:</u> list how you will assess the expected result (measurement tools, Sources of data)	
<u>Results Obtained</u>	
(Include conclusions drawn from the data, especially those related to the expected Results; describe any difficulties with data and/or collection process)	
<u>Use of Results for Improvement</u>	
(List all actions taken in response to the analysis of the data, including dates when taken and /or approximate date action will be taken.)	

\*Developed by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research, University of South Carolina, Beaufort, Dr. Martha Moriarty, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness, Ms. Jodi Herrin, Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

athletics, public safety, and all auxiliary activities such as food service and bookstore are included. In short, every part of the institution must participate in the Institutional Effectiveness process, annually identifying, assessing, and reporting the manner in which the results obtained from the assessment process are used to improve the quality of instruction and the delivery of services for which the institution is responsible.

When an institution undergoes the process of accreditation reaffirmation, it must conduct a self-assessment and report to the SACS Commission on Colleges its conclusion whether or not it is in compliance with Comprehensive Standard 3.3. The review teams appointed by the SACS Commission on Colleges to conduct the review scrutinize carefully the Institutional Effectiveness process within the institution. The review committee in essence conducts an audit of the institution's assessment processes and examines its reports to ensure that they are completed by all units and subunits within the institution and that the results of the assessment process are used for quality improvement. Since the 1980s the SACS Commission on Colleges has made Institutional Effectiveness a cornerstone of its accreditation process. In fact, the SACS Commission on Colleges has been the leader of the six regional accrediting associations in the United States. It was in the forefront of requiring assessment and evaluation as a cornerstone of the accreditation process, and it has remained so for more than two decades. In spite of this fact, there emerged the view at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the SACS Commission on Colleges needed to do more to ensure that the institutions of higher learning within the states comprising its service region are capable of demonstrating that they are, in fact, doing what they claim to do, that is namely to deliver quality instruction,

research, and service. In other words, there emerged the view that the SACS Commission on Colleges should require the institutions within its service region to provide better answers to the perennial question raised at the outset of this paper. From this emerging view came a new paradigm of assessment and evaluation, the Quality Enhancement Plan, which was to have as its central focus the improvement of student learning outcomes.

Though the Quality Enhancement Plan was a new paradigm for the SACS Commission on Colleges, student learning has long been a subject of interest to higher education scholars. Frye (1999) observed that “There are thousands of articles and hundreds of books on student learning.” Assessment of student learning outcomes has been of particular interest to scholars. “The past decade. . . has witnessed something of a culture change in HE and there is recognition that much is to be gained by moving away from the conception of a content-based curriculum to a more student-centered approach. . . Learning outcomes offer a means by which attention can be focused on the actual achievements of students and this represents a more realistic and genuine measure of the value of education than measures of teaching input.” (Maher, 2004).

In 2003 the Council for Higher Education Accreditation called for more attention to be focused on student learning outcomes in the United States. The Council’s Institute for Research and Study of Accreditation and Quality Assurance issued its Statement of Mutual Responsibilities for Student Learning Outcomes: Accreditation, Institutions, and Programs. The Statement was “offered to characterize the work of accreditors, institutions, and programs with respect to student learning outcomes. It [was] intended to provide a common platform upon which to develop appropriate policies and review processes that used evidence of student learning to improve practice, to improve communication with important constituents, and to inform judgments about quality.” Both the research of higher education scholars and the policy recommendations of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation informed the work of the SACS Commission on Colleges as new policies were developed and implemented on the Quality Enhancement Plan.

### **III. The Quality Enhancement Plan: A New Paradigm of Assessment and Evaluation**

By 2004 the SACS Commission on Colleges had sufficiently developed the new paradigm to require that the institutions scheduled that year to have their accreditation reaffirmed develop and submit the first Quality Enhancement Plans. What is the Quality Enhancement Plan and how does it differ from previous requirements? The SACS Commission on Colleges had for more than two decades required that institutions demonstrate continuous improvement efforts through the requirements of Institutional Effectiveness mandated by Comprehensive Standard 3.3. And embedded within the requirements of this Standard was demonstrating identification, assessment, and improvement of student learning. This was done by the institution during its Compliance Certification which is central to the institutional self-evaluation conducted in preparation for the Reaffirmation Review Committee’s onsite visit. It was the Committee’s task to affirm

or disaffirm the institution's conclusion reached during the Compliance Certification self-assessment. Herein lies the major difference between the Compliance Certification and the new Quality Enhancement Plan. Both the institution's self-assessment during the Compliance Certification process and the Reaffirmation Review Committee's audit focused on the past and the present. The new paradigm of the Quality Enhancement Plan was future oriented, and it was based upon the premise "that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning."

The SACS Commission on Colleges says:

By definition, the QEP describes a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. The QEP should be embedded within the institution's ongoing integrated institution-wide planning and evaluation process and may very well evolve from this existing process or from other processes related to the institution's internal reaffirmation review.

The Quality Enhancement Plan is mandated by the Core Requirement 2.12, which states:

The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) included broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

Since the QEP is based on the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all higher education institutions, what exactly does the SACS Commission on Colleges consider to be student learning? According to their publications, they view student learning, broadly defined, as positive change brought about by the educational process in one of four areas: knowledge, skills, behaviors, or values. While they define what is considered to be student learning, there is no prescription regarding what the outcomes at a particular institution should be. The only prescription is that an institution's choice of learning outcomes must be "realistic, measurable" ones that are appropriate for the topic of the QEP. A review of the institutions in the SACS region that were scheduled for accreditation reaffirmation reviews in 2007 reveals the following types of student learning to be the topics of their QEPs: critical thinking, writing skills, computer literacy, communication skills, ethical decision-making, service learning, global awareness, mathematical skills, and higher order thinking.

While the SACS Commission on Colleges does not prescribe what an institution's QEP topic or its student learning outcomes should be, it does prescribe a rather detailed process that should be followed by an institution when developing its QEP, and it prescribes the type of institutional support that is required for the successful initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP. This support must include the following: consensus among key constituencies that the QEP has the potential to transform or improve the quality of

student learning; participation by all segments of the university community in identifying the topic of the QEP; a thorough review of the literature and best practices related to the chosen topic; commitment of adequate financial and human resources to initiate and sustain the QEP over its proposed life span; development of a well-understood implementation chronology with clearly assigned responsibilities within the institution; and development of an evaluation structure to measure the degree of goal accomplishment.

The prescription for development of an effective Quality Enhancement Plan involves ten activities according to the SACS Commission. These activities are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)**

Step	Activity	Characteristics
One	Topic Selection	Originates with the faculty Participation by all constituent groups Major enhancement of student learning Future oriented Based on analysis of empirical data Investigation, discussion, and refinement Methodical, logical, inclusive Reflects institutional culture
Two	Outcomes Definition	Specific Focused Product of enhanced learning Stems from impact of strategies Post implementation of QEP Change oriented: knowledge, skills, behaviors Values
Three	Topic Research	Grounded in review of best practices Literature review Bibliography of current literature Conversations with current practitioners Use of conferences/workshops Consultants for professional development Identification of QEP evaluator
Four	Identification of Implementation Actions	Analysis of Research Actions to be taken Activities to be implemented on campus Completeness of actions identified Impact analysis of identified actions on faculty, students, costs, complexity
Five	Establishment of implementation timeline	Schedule of actions identified Inclusive of all activities Balances desired outcomes and human and financial resources Orderly, manageable, sequencing of actions High probability of adherence Reportable results with five years
Six	Development of organizational structure	Organize to develop Organize to implement Infrastructure for implementation and continuation Identification of parties responsible for actions: budgeting, monitoring progress, plan modifications Ensure qualifications of responsible parties Allocate sufficient time to complete actions Appropriate compensation for responsible parties

Seven	Identification of required resources	Realistic analysis of the desirable and the possible Estimate of physical and human resources Personnel time, money, and materials Investment in professional development
Eight	Assessment of success	Multifaceted Key objectives and benchmarks Crucial feedback to responsible parties Impact of QEP on quality of student learning Multiple strategies using both quantitative and qualitative measures Careful analysis for consistency across different measures Measures need to be both valid and reliable
Nine	Preparation of QEP for SACS	Clear and succinct Not to exceed 100 pages, 75 narrative 25 appendices Contents include: Executive summary Process used to develop Topic selected Desired Student Learning Outcomes Literature review and best practices Actions to be implemented Timeline Organizational structure Resources Assessment Appendices
Ten	Impact report	Not to exceed 10 pages Extent of goal achievement Due five years prior to next reaffirmation visit Part of five-year interim review Assessment results and changes made as a result of analysis of results

\*Adapted from SACS whitepaper The Quality Enhancement Plan, March 4, 2008.

Let us now examine some representative QEPS that have been developed since SACS introduced this new paradigm of assessment in 2004. The QEP descriptions below are based upon executive summaries submitted to The SACS Commission on Colleges by the institutions.

#### **IV. Examples of Institutional QEPs**

##### *At a Research University: The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia*

The University of Virginia, commonly referred to as Mr. Jefferson's University in honor of its founder Thomas Jefferson, is by any measure one of the premier universities in the United States, indeed in the world. Given its distinguished history of research and public service, it is not surprising that the University of Virginia QEP, titled "Enhancing Student-Faculty Engagement, focuses upon student research and public service." The plan seeks to create new opportunities for students to interact with faculty in order to improve student learning outcomes. The plan has two major goals: to make research a fundamental part of the student experience and to incorporate thoughtful public service into the curriculum. These goals are to be accomplished by seven initiatives that will be undertaken during the five-year period to the QEP. These initiatives include: increasing student-faculty research projects; infusing public service into the curriculum;

increasing the number of small classes; placing greater emphasis on student-faculty lunch and dinner programs; increasing engagement through academic advising; expanding the Center for Undergraduate Excellence; and creating mechanisms to communicate opportunities. The QEP reflects the University's view of itself as a "community of discovery," in which students are partners with the faculty in the learning process. As such the QEP continues Mr. Jefferson's view of the University of Virginia as an "academic village," in which daily life is characterized by shared learning between faculty and students.

*At a Comprehensive University: Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia*

Located in one of Atlanta's fastest growing northwest suburban areas, Kennesaw State is the third largest university in the University System of Georgia. It is a comprehensive metropolitan university offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. It is known as an institution that emphasizes to its students the importance of public service and for promoting international student success. The institution has been recognized by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities as one of the top publicly engaged universities in the United States. Kennesaw State's QEP builds upon both its emphasis upon public service and internationalization. Titled "Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship," the QEP focuses upon increasing international learning experiences for its students, implementing a certificate program in global learning, and providing increased financial support for students studying abroad. In short, the plan seeks to expand campus-wide participation in global learning and to expand graduates' global perspectives, intercultural engagement skills, and global citizenship attitudes. The QEP builds on the institution's twenty-year history of emphasizing the importance of internationalization in higher education and seeks to develop a "progressive educational model for global learning that extends beyond the traditional focus on study abroad and foreign language acquisition . . . ." Kennesaw State's QEP recognizes the reality of globalization in the twenty-first century and the need for higher education institutions to prepare their students through an internationalized curriculum to effectively participate in it.

*At a Community College: Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College Asheville, North Carolina*

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College has a record of being rated one of the "superior" institutions within the fifty-eight North Carolina Community College System. It has also a long history of focusing upon student success through its institutional effectiveness processes. In 1997, the institution amended its mission statement to state: "A-B Tech, the community's college, is dedicated to student success," and it can through institutional effectiveness data demonstrate much success in this regard. For example, criteria such as employment rate of all graduates as high as 99.7%; students indicating attainment of educational goals 100%; and passing rates of students in development courses as high as 92%. Given its successful track record of focusing upon student success, A-B Tech chose Invitational Education as the model for their QEP; the title selected was "Developing Strategies for Student Success through Invitational Education." As a theory of practice, Invitational Education has a goal of creating a total college environment

that advocates success for all associated with the institution. Its major tenets argue that education is a cooperative, collaborative process; people should be valued and treated responsibly; untapped human potential exists in all areas of human endeavor; and human potential is best developed by institutions and persons who are inviting to others. A-B Tech views the inviting campus environment and student success as being directly correlated. As a part of their plan to improve student success through Invitational Education, the institution became a member of the International Alliance for Invitational Education, which was founded in 1982 by Drs. William W. Purkey and Betty L. Siegel and which includes some 1200 member institutions in twelve different countries. A-B Tech views Invitational Education as the key to continuing efforts to improve student success.

*At a Church-Affiliated University: Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama*

Samford University promotes itself as the largest privately-funded and fully accredited university in the state of Alabama. It was founded by the Baptists in 1841 and remains wholeheartedly committed to the tenets and beliefs of that faith. Unlike some church-affiliated institutions that only claim that a religious denomination originally founded them, Samford unapologetically clings to its founding roots. The institution in its publications talks about “The Samford Distinction,” claiming that those “who attend Samford University recognize that it is not like other universities.” Further, the institution views itself as a “community where faculty members show Christ-like concern for students’ welfare and personal growth. Samford seeks to create a university climate that is different from most—a climate of Christ-like living and unashamed Christ-like commitment.” In spite of its strong emphasis upon the Baptist religion, the institution claims to welcome students of all faiths; its official statements reflect a commitment to individual thought, reflection, and reason. Students are encouraged to consider differing points of view and reach their own conclusions. Additionally its core values include, among other things, a commitment to “learning and freedom of inquiry,” “personal empowerment, accountability, and responsibility,” and “appreciation for diverse cultures and convictions.” Tremendous emphasis is placed upon the personal growth of students and quality academic instruction. The Samford QEP, titled “The Scholars Initiative,” seeks to address three deficiencies in the institution’s Honors Program: critical thinking, cultural awareness, and personal calling. The Scholars Initiative focuses on three selective academic programs: The Freshman Scholars Program, The Howard Scholars Program, and The Professional Scholars Program. The objectives of these programs are to enhance current academic programs, to encourage students to think more critically; to provide opportunities for students to engage in discipline-based research; and prepare students for prestigious scholarships and premier graduate programs. Included within all three initiatives are rigorous teaching methods that focus upon close reading, intensive writing, challenging cultural experiences, and personal reflection.

*At a Liberal Arts College for Women: Converse College, Spartanburg South Carolina*

Converse College is a small liberal arts college for women. It is located in the Upstate region of the state

of South Carolina and has been preparing women for leadership positions for over one hundred years. The institution has a reputation as an outstanding liberal arts institution noted for its academic rigor, quality instruction, and an emphasis on international education. Its Chapman Study Abroad Endowment allows students educational opportunities for lengthy study at colleges and universities in Australia, England, France, Iceland, Spain, and numerous countries. The institution is also known for its programs in music and the arts. It is the only women's college in the world to be named an All Steinway School, a distinction given to a select number of institutions by Steinway and Sons because they primarily use Steinway concert and practice pianos. Converse College views its mission as "shaping women of today into leaders of tomorrow," developing them "as complete persons-intellectually, socially, physically, and spiritually." Effective communication in both writing and speaking are foundational to this process and is the subject of Converse's QEP, which they titled "Communication Fluency." It is based upon the belief that focused efforts aimed at improving writing and speaking skills lead to improvement in student learning, and it has two major goals: that Converse students be able to articulate well-developed and informed thoughts in organized and clear writing, and that they demonstrate effective oral communication through reasoned dialogue and presentation. Technology skills are also required as a component of the process of improving student learning through enhanced communication skills. Writing and speaking skills are emphasized in all general education courses, specific upper-division courses, and in the culminating capstone course. They are also infused into as many student life activities as possible, for example internships, community service projects, travel study, interaction with guest lecturers, as well as others.

## V. Conclusion: QEP Pros and Cons

The Quality Enhancement Plans developed in accordance with the process outlined in Table 2 clearly are an attempt on the part of the SACS Commission on Colleges and its member institutions to more definitively answer the question raised at the outset of this paper. They are initiatives designed to improve the educational experiences of their students and by so doing providing evidence to institutional stakeholders, the public, and government officials that they, the institutions, are concerned about quality, assessment, and continuous improvement. They are plans that endeavour to enhance the quality of higher education and to improve the learning of their students through positive change brought about by the educational process in their knowledge, skills, behaviors, or values.

The Quality Enhancement Plans that have been developed by the institutions in the SACS Region are not "original research," but they are solidly grounded in research and best practices that have been reported in contemporary scholarship. They are empirically based, utilizing assessment measures that are both valid and reliable. They are plans that are developed not only to meet accreditation reaffirmation requirements, yes they are that, but they are also carefully crafted plans of action that when implemented hopefully have the potential of transforming institutions. They are designed to enable higher education institutions in the

southeastern United States to answer the perennial question raised at the outset in the affirmative.

The aforementioned characteristics of the QEPS that have been developed since 2004 are aspirational in nature. They are goals that the colleges and universities in the Southeastern region of the United States hope will be achieved by their Quality Enhancement Plans. Given the fact that the first class of QEPS was submitted in 2004, and their Impact Reports are only now in 2009 coming due, it is premature to definitively say that this new assessment paradigm will accomplish all that was intended by its creators. However, it is possible now some five years into the process to draw some conclusions regarding the pros and cons of the Quality Enhancement Plan as a method of improving student learning outcomes.

Numerous positive things can be said about what the process of developing a QEP does for an institution. The process encourages an in-depth institutional self-analysis. It asks such questions as: Who are we? What are we about? What is our purpose? It is an inclusive process, involving when appropriately done every constituency within the institution. The process is future focused, emphasizing what can be done over the next five years to improve the quality of student learning outcomes. As such its focus is upon instruction and learning within the institution. It is also a process that emphasizes assessment mechanisms that are grounded in best practices research and based upon empirical evidence not anecdotal information. It is a process that reflects institutional culture and the collective wisdom of the university community, although the process originates with the faculty, the heart and soul of the higher education enterprise. Development of the QEP brings a university community together behind a commonly-agreed-upon set of goals toward which all members of the institution work. As such it offers tremendous potential of accomplishing those quality improvements envisioned by its creators, and as such does hold out the possibility of transforming in positive ways institutions of higher learning.

The QEP, like the regional accreditation process, is not without its detractors. Some of the same arguments that can be levied against the burdensome nature of the reaffirmation process can also be seen in the QEP. It is a very time consuming process, requiring from one to two years to develop. It is likewise a costly process, costing even the smallest of institutions tens of thousands of dollars. It is also a process that involves extensive data collection, assessment, and reporting, all of which are both time consuming and costly. As such the QEP process has the potential of becoming excessively bureaucratic, an often-heard complaint levied against institutional effectiveness and accountability processes at both the state and regional levels. Finally, there are those who would argue that like regional accreditation the QEP process encourages too much intrusion into the academy by outside entities, namely the regional accrediting association, resulting in a loss of institutional autonomy.

On balance, it appears five years into the process that the potential advantages of the QEP process outweigh the disadvantages because calls by government policymakers, the corporate sector, and the public for evidence from institutions of higher learning to demonstrate that they do, in fact, what they say are not going to go away. The member institutions of the SACS Commission on Colleges have yet one additional arrow in their quiver with which to respond to such calls once having developed and implemented their QEP.

In time the Impact Reports submitted by institutions will indicate the real value of the QEP as an assessment paradigm.

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## 学生の学習に関するアセスメント—質向上計画

レイバーン・バートン \*

大学教育と学生の学習に関するアセスメントが、世界中の高等教育機関にとって長期的な課題となっている。大学管理者、教授陣、州の政策担当者、そしてアクレディテーション団体は、大学で質の高い学習が行われていることを利害関係者に示すために、その指標を何十年にもわたって追い求めてきた。これらのイニシアティブは、成果のアセスメント、質保証、高等教育機関の有効性、付加価値、継続的改善などさまざまに呼ばれてきた。

アメリカ合衆国では、6つの地域別アクレディテーション団体がアセスメントの中心的存在であり、アクレディテーションのプロセスにおいてアセスメントはきわめて重要な一部となっている。この点について、地域別アクレディテーション団体のリーダー的存在であるのが南部地区基準協会の大学評価委員会であり、同委員会は30年以上にわたって、加盟大学が機関としての有効性を示すことを求めてきた。しかしそれにもかかわらず、同委員会では、21世紀を迎えて、学生の学習成果が改善されていることの証明を加盟大学に対してより強く求めるべきであるという意見が出てきた。その結果、質向上計画（Quality Enhancement Plan, QEP）と呼ばれるアセスメントの新しいパラダイムが2004年から登場することになった。

本稿では、QEPについて、その目的、発展、実施状況、それに対する評価などの視点から考察を加える。本稿ではまた、研究大学、都市型総合大学、コミュニティ・カレッジ、宗派立大学、リベラルアーツ型女性大学など、さまざまな種類の高等教育機関によって実施されているQEPの事例を取り上げる。最後に、QEPに関する賛否両論について、アセスメントのモデルという観点や高等教育機関を向上させる可能性といった観点から議論を行う。

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