University to create enhancement plan for accreditation

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Every ten years, North Carolina A&T State University must get reaccredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in a process called reaffirmation of accreditation.

Accreditation is key to admission into graduate school, federal financial aid as well as the overall achievement of an institution's students.

Graphic Communication Systems and Tech Studies professor, Dr. Vincent Childress, is playing a key role in making sure that A&T is ready to be evaluated by taking part in the Quality Enhancement Plan Committee.

"In the current cycle, we have to be ready to be reaccredited for 2010," Childress said. "This time, the QEP is being added to the reaccreditation process, which represents a philosophy about what A&T can do in the future.

A Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a new SACS requirement in which A&T demonstrates that it can take input from the broader university community, existing data, the university's strategic plan and mission, and develop and implement a project aimed at improving some specific aspect of student achievement, of learning outcomes or improve something about the learning environment.

"Looking at data from the past is probably not as good of a way of demonstrating the university's commitment to ongoing improvement. So, they came up with the QEP," Childress added.

The 2007 Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation supplies institutions with the step-by-step process of developing, organizing and carrying out a successful plan for submission to SACS. According to the handbook, "Institutions report that the QEP 'has caused [them] to become much more intentional and focused about an important element of [their] mission' and 'helped put in motion [their] creativity.'"

The QEP is a plan that looks more at what a university can do for the future more so than what they've done in the past. According to Dr. Childress the QEP Committee, last year, conducted group meetings with all the schools and colleges of A&T in order to gain faculty, staff and administrative input.

Focus groups involving students and staff, took part in student surveys where more than 400 faculty, staff, and administrators participated and more than 700 students provided input.

The surveys given to students serve as an "Importance-Perfomance" rating assessment in which students are asked to rate the importance of about 20 faculty and staff ideas for improvement in terms of importance on a scale from 1-6. Then, students are asked to rate how well those issues are addressed on a scale of 1-6.

Childress further describes it as a graph. If both variables, the importance of the ideas and how they are addressed, increase that means the university is doing well in those areas.

However, if the importance goes up, but how well they are addressed goes down, those are things that will be possibly be included in the QEP to improve "student achievement of learning outcomes."

"When you go to a class, the first thing you go over with a professor is the syllabus and on the syllabus are the specific things that you've got to accomplish during that class," explained Childress. "Those things are what they mean by student achievement of learning outcomes."

The handbook also asks that institutions specify "realistic, measurable student learning outcomes appropriate for their focused topic." Starting in the summer of 2010, the university has five years to carry out the plan after it has been evaluated and approved by SACS.

Groups that have participated in student focus groups include the School of Education, School of Technology, School of Engineering and recently, the student senate.

To get involved in the enhancement plan by participating in an "Importance-Performance" rating assessment, student organizations, faculty and staff can email Dr. Childress at children@ncat.edu and invite him to a meeting.

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