Virginia Polytechnic Institute And State University

SACS Criteria Compliance Study Proposal

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Figure Number	Figure Type	Figure Name
1	Harvard Graphics	IRPA9606

Background

The Office of Institutional Research was asked to develop a proposal for conducting the criteria compliance portion of the strategic self-study in support of the Self-Study team headed by David Conn of the Provost's office. The following discusses some of the relevant issues involved.

The strategic self-study is comprised of two major components. The "focused" component of the self-study involves focusing in on a major concern or set of concerns as identified by the university. The second component is basically an audit to establish that the university has complied with the various SACS criteria. Evidence is collected in this component to document that the institution has met the requirements established in the Criteria for Accreditation. Establishing criteria compliance is traditionally seen as a data collection process since one of the criteria is that the university be managed in a fashion that the responses are readily available through routinely collected data.

As part of the accreditation process, the university which desires to conduct a strategic self-study is required to propose a process for both the *focused* and the *criteria compliance* portions of the self-study. The proposal is then reviewed by the Commission on Colleges in the Fall prior to the initiation of the study. For Virginia Tech to conduct a focused self-study, it needs to develop its

proposal this summer for the Fall 1995 meeting of the Commission on Colleges. The following is the basis of a possible procedure which could be used to support the criteria compliance portion of the self-study if the University elects to propose a focused look at its key concerns.

The attached figure shows the proposed Criteria Compliance structure. There is a Steering Committee of approximately 20-30 members consisting of representatives from senior management areas and other major operational areas that are expected to provide documentation for the compliance process. Many of these members would represent key administrative components of the University

The role of the Steering Committee would be to provide policy guidance, review and approval for the compliance study process. Day-to-day activities would be coordinated and implemented by an Staff Group of some four to six individuals, with representatives taken from the Executive VP area, the Provost area, the President's area, the Director of Institutional Research, and someone providing administrative and editorial assistance.

The third element of the structure involves "working cells" of individuals who would collect and distill the evidence of criteria compliance from various documents and historical records. These working cells are tentatively grouped into three areas and possible committees are shown heading up these areas. These groups would include 3-15 people depending on the area. It is recommended that, when appropriate, these groups also contain a mixture of faculty, students, and alumni.

Evidence of criteria compliance is driven by what SACS calls "must statements." There are several hundred 'must' statements. (An outline of the criteria is included with this report.) We have grouped these statements into the operational areas most closely aligned with the 'must' statement. Each of the 'must' statements would be assigned to one of the three groups, and from that group, to one of the working cells. Working cells are strongly linked to the existing administrative or governance structure of the university or its related organizations.

Initiation of Structure

The 'must' statements have been grouped into an initial set of homogenous categories, each of which has been associated with a senior administrative area and also with an initial component of the university governance structure of councils, commissions, and committees. The proposed assignments/associations should be reviewed by appropriate representatives of the administrative, academic, institutional, and governance areas. This review should result in a tentative identification of responsible individuals for each 'must' statement and produce a list of administrative areas who need to be represented on the Steering Committee. Individuals who manage the directly affected areas should receive the revised list of 'must' statement assignments. They should verify the assignment of the 'must' statements and the individual who is responsible for each 'must' statement. It is envisioned that in many cases, the

responsible individual will be a staff person who is supervised by the manager.

As part of the initiation phase, primary senior management areas will be asked to appoint a representative to the Steering Committee. As shown in Figure , the Steering Committee may also include representatives from the Faculty Senate, the staff, alumni, students, and the colleges. Since most of the required evidence is thought to be internal, it is not anticipated that there will be much, if any, involvement of external groups.

Once the President (or other appropriate individual) has made formal appointments to the Steering Committee, the Steering Committee will develop policies for demonstrating criteria compliance, review the procedures proposed by the Staff Group, consider and obtain resources required to conduct, organize, and archive the documentation, consider relations with the focused portion of the self-study, and perform other duties as deemed appropriate.

The Steering Committee should be chaired by a senior faculty member or one with extensive faculty experience. It is possible that the individual will be given release time for this activity.

It is also highly desirable that an administrative assistant/editor be selected to support the criteria compliance process. This assistant could be shared with the Focused part of the self-study as it initiates its activities. This person would be responsible for coordinating a large number of group meetings, organizing, standardizing, and archiving the various documents and other indicators of criteria compliance; and performing other administrative and clerical duties.

Ongoing Activities

At one of the first meetings of the Steering Committee, the specific individual who will be responsible for documenting compliance with each MUST statement will be confirmed. Also the Steering Committee will review a proposed time-line and major milestones for the criteria compliance process. It may also be appropriate for the committee to consider the proper mission, objectives, and rules of evidence for the activity.

Once the named individuals are identified and the rules of evidence articulated, the members of the Staff Group will initiate the appropriate training, reallocation of resources, and other events to facilitate the collection of the data in such a manner that the milestones for the reaffirmation will be completed on the schedule provided. Facilities, file cabinets, and shelving will need to be installed in the appropriate location for the documentation supporting criteria compliance. To the extent possible the documentation will be maintained in an electronic format at a publicly accessible location (see Appendix for details).

The Staff Group will be responsible for identifying additional resource requirements or opportunities to re-focus resources, for accumulating and monitoring progress in meeting

milestones, for the need to focus on specific areas to strengthen evidence of criteria compliance, and for preparing material for the agenda for the Steering Committee.

The Staff Group will work with the administrative assistant to keep the draft Criteria Compliance Report (CCR) updated. The draft Criteria Compliance Report will start as a list of the 'must' statements from the criteria, identified by number to reflect their location in the criteria. The CCR will contain, for each 'must' statement, the name of the individual responsible for developing the evidence, the location of the evidence, a summary of the evidence, and the name of the individual on the steering committee directly associated with the responsible individual. It is highly likely that there will be multiple items for any given 'must' statement. This is specifically relevant where the 'must' statement requires a sequence of items to establish the evaluation of an activity and the use of that evaluation. Where the evidence can be reproduced, the filing location will be included, otherwise the location and retrieval process will be identified. As the evidence for the 'must' statements becomes more refined and complete, the CCR becomes the annotated bibliography and road map which is then given to the visiting committee which collects data for the Commission on Colleges of SACS. It is anticipated that the CCR will be developed to be consistent with the current options available with desk-top publishing and data base management.

Success Factors

It is anticipated that the successful Criteria Compliance Study will produce:

1. A named person for each 'must' statement.
2. A set of "rules of evidence" consistent with authorized record keeping and that demonstrate meeting of the minimum standards.
3. A standard method of determining what to collect and what to refer to in its normal location.
4. A distribution of effort such that no one individual or group of individuals is operating substantially beyond their normal assignment or being required to drastically increase their contribution to the University.
5. A process which places the minimum financial resource requirement on the university and participating functions while demonstrating compliance.
6. Minimum creation of additional data, documents, groups, and technological tools.
7. A sense of appropriate representation and fair involvement by the groups of individuals who have a traditional high stake in the operation of areas covered by the audit.
8. Distribution of information consistent with the characteristics of the information, the needs of the users, and the technology of the university.
9. Use of results to identify and implement opportunities for improvement as these results are obtained rather than waiting till the end of the Self-Study process.
10. A process whereby the procedures are smoothly driven by strategic policy decisions and do not reflect inappropriate by-products which support personal or organizational

desires and which are not an integral part of the compliance audit.

11. Results which support the proper management and institutional effectiveness of the university and the documentation of progress in the Plan to Restructure Virginia Tech.
12. A mechanism by which improvements can be made as opportunities are discovered.
13. An effort to improve performance, and reduce waste and unnecessary complexity without a sense of territorial or personal threat.

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APPENDIX - UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT SELF-STUDY PROCESS

Introduction

Technology has been a highly effective tool for sharing information and conducting communications. Technology allows communication and information retrieval to occur to take place at times convenient to the customer. Improved software has also improved the customer's ability to search the documents on machines connected to the Internet. In particular, the technologies that support this environment include networked environments, client server technology and software that provides search capabilities.

Both the spirit and the intent of the Self study can be enhanced by incorporating communications technologies into the process. The specific technologies being recommended include both client server technology and world wide technologies. The intent is to make available a web home-page for the self-study with pointers to the already existing strategic planning gopher and the information it houses, and the other Virginia Tech systems that contain information such as the governance structure or policies. Additionally, at each phase of the self-study, documents would be posted for the university community to view and comment.

Issues

Security is one issue that needs to be addressed. While the intent is to ensure broad participation and the broadest sharing of information possible throughout the process with the entire university community, the intent is also (I suspect) to limit access to the information to the university community.

There is currently no *equipment* on site in Institutional Research that could be used as a server for this project. A machine purchased for this would cost approximately $2000. While much of the required software is available free on the Internet, we would still need programming support equipment, programming support would also be needed for the development of the web site and homepage.