

**Resource Manual for the *Principles of Accreditation:*  
*Foundations for Quality Enhancement, 2004 and 2007 Interim Editions*  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges**

**Section I: Principles and Philosophy of Accreditation**

**1.2 Quality Enhancement**

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation as reflected in *The Principles of Accreditation* as follows:

The Commission on Colleges expects an institution to dedicate itself to enhancing the quality of its programs and services within the context of its mission, resources, and capabilities, and to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occurs.

The concept of quality enhancement presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution's educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major assets. (2004 Edition)

**Section II: Core Requirements**

**2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) 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) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.** (2007 Interim Edition)

**2.13 Rationale and Notes:**

The *Principles of Accreditation* attests to the commitment of the Commission on Colleges to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and to the proposition that student learning is at the heart of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a component of the accreditation process that reflects and affirms both of these commitments. Developing a QEP as part of the reaffirmation process is an opportunity and an impetus for an institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning.

The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) directly related to enhancing student learning. Student learning is defined broadly in the context of the QEP and may address a wide range of topics or issues but, in all cases, the goals and evaluation strategies need to be clearly and directly linked to improving the quality of student learning. In order to ensure that the QEP is implemented, the institution integrates it into its ongoing planning and evaluation process.

**Note:** The QEP is a course of action that is specific to an institution and its mission. It is intended to be customized and designed to meet the needs of the particular institution. It is an opportunity for an institution to be creative in an area related to compliance with the *Principles*. Therefore, although an institution may want to study QEPs completed by other institutions, an institution's QEP should reflect the needs of the institution and be customized to accomplish its goals.

At the time of the on-site review, the Commission expects an institution to have in place all components that are characteristic to any workable plan: (1) a focused topic (directly related to student learning), (2) clear goals, (3) adequate resources in place to implement the plan, (4) evaluation strategies for determining the achievement of goals, and (5) evidence of community development and support of the plan.

#### **Relevant Questions for Consideration:**

- Has the institution identified and provided a clear and concise description of a significant issue(s) directly related to student learning?
- What are the goals for the QEP and how do they relate to student learning?
- What are the intended benefits of the QEP to the institution and to the student?
- What resources (personnel, financial, physical, academic, etc.) are necessary for the successful implementation of the QEP?
- How will the progress of the QEP be monitored? (timelines, administration, and oversight of its implementation by qualified individuals, etc.)
- What are the evaluation strategies identified by the institution that will determine the success of the institution's QEP? How will the evaluation findings be used to improve student learning?
- How has the QEP been integrated into the institution's ongoing planning and evaluation processes?
- How has the institution demonstrated that a cross section of its community has been involved in the development of the QEP? (2004 Edition)