

Gordon College Plan For Reaffirmation of Accreditation 2004-2007

Gordon College Office of Institutional Research
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Summary Time Line	3
The Accreditation Process	5
General Information on the Accreditation Process	5
Steps in the Process	6
Reaffirmation at Gordon College: Stages and Responsibilities	7
Groundwork Stage	7
Compliance Certification Stage	8
QEP Stage	9
Review and Response Stage	10
Detailed Time Line for Reaffirmation	11



Executive Summary

With leadership by the President and administration by the Accreditation Liaison, the Fall 2004 semester will mark the beginning of a three year plan for reaffirmation of accreditation at Gordon College.

Under the 2004 version of SACS' Principles of Accreditation, reaffirmation proceeds in eight steps:

1. Orientation of Leadership Team on January 30, 2005.
2. Submission of Compliance Certification on March 15, 2006.
3. Off-site review during May 15-19, 2006.
4. Preparation of Focused Report addressing off-site review findings.
5. Submission of Quality Enhancement Plan on August 15, 2006.
6. Visit by On-Site Review Committee in September or October, 2006.
7. Response to the On-Site Review Committee's findings.
8. SACS action on reaffirmation in June, 2007.

Beginning with presentation of the reaffirmation plan to the faculty and staff and appointment of a reaffirmation Leadership Team, the process will proceed in four overlapping stages:

In the Groundwork Stage (Fall 2004 – Fall 2005), a Compliance Preparation Task Force will ensure that the college is prepared to document compliance with all requirements while a web based interface is built as a tool both for communication and for writing and documenting the Compliance Certification.

In the Compliance Certification Stage (Spring 2005 – Spring 2006), a Compliance Certification Workgroup will prepare the text and documentation for the Compliance Certification. A draft of the Compliance Certification will be reviewed by a Mock Review Team and subsequently revised by the workgroup prior to submission to SACS on March 15, 2006.

In the QEP Stage (Spring 2005 – Summer 2007), a QEP Committee will build upon the Title III effort to ensure that the college can demonstrate compliance with the QEP requirement.

In the Review/Response Stage (Spring 2006 – Fall 2007), a Response Team will respond to findings of both the off-site review and the on-site review in anticipation of the Commission's reaffirmation action in June 2007.

While top-level responsibility for the process rests with the Leadership Committee, the attached reaffirmation plan calls for six additional (but likely overlapping) committees and task forces, justified by the complexity of the process, to execute the various steps of the process. The plan which follows is meant as a "roadmap" for the process. Each of the four stages will require more detailed planning to be carried out by the relevant committees and task forces working with the Leadership Team and the Accreditation Liaison.

Summary Time Line

	Groundwork Stage	Compliance Certification Stage	QEP Stage	Review and Response Stage
Fall 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present plan to faculty • Designate, charge, orient Leadership team • Design reaffirmation website • Document survey • Designate Compliance Preparation Task Force • Review requirements and identify gaps • Develop plans for addressing gaps • SACS Conference in Atlanta (Dec. 4-7) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Title III Proposal 	
Spring 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation in Atlanta (Jan. 28) • Implement gap-closing plans • Develop website • Populate documents library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate and charge Compliance Certification Workgroup • Begin preparation of CC text for complex sections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and submit Title III proposal • Explore potential QEP focus • Designate and charge QEP Committee 	
Summer 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue gap-closing plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue preparation of CC text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize QEP focus • Develop plan for QEP preparation 	
Fall 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of all gap-closing plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate and Charge the Mock Review Team • Review Team begins evaluation of CC draft • Complete CC draft • Begin revisions as Mock Review Team produces feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the campus in planning the QEP 	

Spring 2006		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete final CC • Submit Compliance Certification to SACS (March 15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare QEP draft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete review of CC draft • Designate and charge Response Team • Designate and Charge a Site Visit Arrangements Committee • Off-site Review (May 15-19)
Summer 2006			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete QEP • Submit QEP to SACS (Aug. 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive verbal report from off-site review • Decision on Focused Report • If necessary begin FR • Plan for site visit
Fall 2006				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete FR prior to site-visit • Site visit (Sept. or Oct.) • Begin preparing response to site-visit
Spring 2007				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and submit response
Summer 2007				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SACS action on reaffirmation (June 19-27)

The Accreditation Process

The following two sections provide SACS' "official" overview of the reaffirmation process and are taken verbatim from the referenced sources.

General Information on the Accreditation Process¹

The accrediting standards used by the Commission on Colleges are contained in the handbook, *Principles of Accreditation*. This document provides consistent guidelines for peer review, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education.

Approximately six months prior to the scheduled reaffirmation visit, an institution must submit a Compliance Certification document that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Regulations as presented in the *Principles*. The Compliance Certification document is reviewed by an off-site review committee which advises the on-site review committee by making observations about the information the institution provides and by determining the institution's compliance with standards.

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation. Each institution applying for accreditation or renewal of accreditation is required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning.

At the culmination of the QEP, the Commission on Colleges sends an on-site committee of professional peers to the campus to assess the educational strengths and weaknesses of the institution. The written report of the committee helps the institution improve its programs, refine its QEP, and also provides the basis on which the Commission decides to grant, continue, reaffirm, or withdraw accreditation.

During a typical three-day visit, committee members examine data and conduct interviews in order to evaluate the soundness of the QEP and ascertain whether the institution is in compliance with the *Principles*. The committee offers written advice to the institution, develops a consensus on its findings, and completes a draft report. Finally, the committee presents an oral summary in an exit report to

¹ This section is from the SACS Website, "General Information on the Accreditation Process," <http://sacscoc.org/genaccproc.asp>

the chief executive officer and invited institutional officials on the last day of the visit.

The departure of the committee from campus does not mark the end of the accreditation process. The visiting committee report and the response of the institution to the findings of the committee are reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports, a standing committee of the Commission. The Committee on Compliance and Reports recommends action on accreditation to the Executive Council of the Commission. The Executive Council in turn recommends action to the Commission on Colleges, which makes the final decision. These decisions are announced to the College Delegate Assembly during its annual business session.

Steps in the Process²

1. The Commission staff conducts an orientation for the institution's Leadership Team.
2. The institution prepares and submits its Compliance Certification and relevant supporting documentation (and annual institutional profiles) to the Commission on Colleges.
3. The Off-Site Review Committee reviews the Compliance Certification and supporting documentation attesting to the institution's determination of its compliance with all Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards with the exception of Core Requirement Twelve, which relates to the Quality Enhancement Plan. The Off-Site Committee's prepares a report of its findings for each institution it reviews.
4. The Commission staff orally communicates to the institution a summary of the report prepared by the Off-Site Committee. The institution *may choose* to submit a Focused Report in response to the committee's findings. The On-Site Committee receives a written copy of the Off-Site Committee's report and the institution's Focused Report, if one is submitted.
5. The institution submits its Quality Enhancement Plan to the Commission.
6. The On-Site Review Committee visits the institution to review and determine the acceptability of the QEP, to review areas of non-compliance and other areas of concern noted by the Off-Site Committee, and to review any areas of concern that surface during the visit. The On-Site Committee submits its report to the Commission.

² SACS *Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, 5-6.

7. The institution prepares a response to the On-Site Committee's report and submits it to the Commission.
8. The Commission reviews the findings included in the report of the On-Site Committee and the institution's response and takes action on the institution's reaffirmation.

Reaffirmation at Gordon College: Stages and Responsibilities

"Officially" starting the reaffirmation process at the beginning of the Fall 2004 semester gives us seventeen months to prepare the Compliance Certification and two years to complete the QEP. We can organize our work in four stages: Groundwork, Compliance Certification, QEP, and Review/Response. Note that the four stages will have considerable overlap in their timing.

Groundwork Stage

The first step in laying the groundwork for reaffirmation will be the President's appointment and charge of a **Leadership Team**, responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the reaffirmation process run smoothly with guidance and support at the highest levels of the college. Note that only four members of the Leadership Team will be able to attend the SACS Orientation on Jan. 30, 2005.

The **Leadership Team** assures guidance and support at the highest level. The President's Council, consisting of the Cabinet and chairs of the Faculty and Staff Senates, may be appropriate as the Leadership Team, assuring support throughout the faculty, staff, and administration.

While attendance at the January orientation session is limited, attendance at the SACS conference in December is open to as many individuals as we're willing to pay for. The Leadership Team should take advantage of the 2004 (and 2005) conference location in Atlanta, and carefully consider the composition of a team of attendees which can benefit most from the specific conference sessions.

During the Groundwork Stage, the entire faculty and staff should become familiar with the reaffirmation plan, and an on-line infrastructure, consisting of a reaffirmation website and a documents library, will be built not only to facilitate preparation of the Compliance Certification and the QEP, but also to serve as a communications medium by which the entire college community can stay informed about the process.

A critical aspect of the Groundwork Stage will be the completion of a number of efforts, some of which are already under way, to ensure that we are fully able to demonstrate our compliance with all accrediting standards. Specifically, the

Leadership Team will appoint a Compliance Preparation Task Force to review all requirements and identify those areas where gaps may exist in our ability to fully document compliance.

The **Compliance Preparation Task Force**, to begin work in Fall 2004, will review all accreditation standards, find areas with potential compliance or documentation gaps, and implement plans to close the gaps. The task force should include members thoroughly familiar with the following compliance areas:

- Curriculum
- Financial/Physical/Foundation
- Faculty
- Governance
- Library/Technology
- Mission, Planning, and Evaluation
- Policies
- Students Affairs and Services

This task force may best be chosen from academic division heads, administrative directors, and chairs of relevant committees.

The Preparation Task Force will then work with faculty, staff, and existing committees (e.g. Assessment, Planning, APC, etc.) to develop and implement plans to “close the gaps,” so that all requirements can be fully documented by December, 2005. In some cases, such as general education and program assessment, these plans are already under way, and the key challenge will be to ensure that present targets are met.

Compliance Certification Stage

Preparation of the Compliance Certification is specifically not meant to involve the entire community. If the documentation gaps are properly closed, then preparation of the Compliance Certification is largely an administrative chore, to be completed by a **Compliance Certification Workgroup**.

The **Compliance Certification Workgroup** to begin work in Spring 2005, will prepare the actual text of the Compliance Certification. Consisting of individuals familiar with the compliance areas listed above, the workgroup will likely have considerable overlap with the Preparation Task Force, but may include other appropriate members of the faculty and staff as well.

The workgroup will begin by familiarizing itself with all accreditation requirements and proposing a schedule for preparing text and references documenting each requirement. The website will have a compliance certification template for

entering text and hyperlinks to the document library which the workgroup will use to actually write the compliance report.

Several of the requirements involve complex documentation, and the committee should identify those requirements and begin working on them during Spring 2005. Work will continue during the summer so that a draft of the Compliance Certification will be completed some time in the Fall 2005 semester.

Early in Fall 2005, the Leadership Team will appoint and charge a Mock Review Team, which will view the draft compliance report from the perspective of the Off-Site Review Committee.

The **Mock Review Team**, to begin work in Fall 2005, will simulate the off-site review. The team should consist of faculty and staff who are not on the Preparation Task Force or the Compliance Workgroup. We may want to consider including outside consultants or arranging to “exchange” mock reviewers with other schools undergoing reaffirmation.

The Mock Review Team and the Compliance Workgroup will work iteratively, with the Workgroup making revisions to the draft based on the Review Team’s comments. A final version of the Compliance Certification will be prepared early in the Spring 2006 semester for submission to SACS on March 15.

QEP Stage

Unlike the Compliance Certification, the Quality Enhancement Plan is meant to involve a broad spectrum of the college community. The structure and purpose of the QEP is similar to that of the Title III Program. In both cases, a specific need for improvement is identified, and a plan is implemented for addressing the need. While both are focused on a well defined, specific need, the focus is meant to involve and impact faculty, staff, administrators, and students throughout the college. Because of the parallel nature of Title III and the QEP, we have approached our Title III proposal as a prototype for the QEP. The preparation of the Title III application gives us a head start on reaffirmation; if the Title III application is successful, then we will, in effect, already have a QEP in place, although it will likely be necessary to produce a separate QEP document for reaffirmation integrating issues uncovered by the Compliance Certification and off-site review.

The **QEP Committee**, to begin work in Spring 2005, will be responsible for preparing the QEP. The Leadership Team should choose the committee in light of a probable QEP focus, which will depend somewhat on Title III progress. The QEP Committee must be available during Summer 2006 to make final revisions to the QEP based on findings from the on-site visit.

The QEP stage, then, has actually been under way since we began work on the Title III proposal, which will be submitted in Spring 2005. A QEP Committee will

plan and carry out the actual transition from Title III proposal to QEP. Both the focus and scope of the QEP will depend somewhat on the outcome of our Title III application. During Spring 2005, the QEP Committee should review the SACS requirements for the QEP and evaluate it in light of progress on our Title III grant application. By the time a decision is made on the Title III application, presumably in Summer 2005, the QEP Committee should be in a good position to determine how to proceed on the QEP along one of three lines:

1. If we receive the Title III grant, then the Title III program may virtually become the QEP. The actual written QEP would then involve some form of reformatting the Title III proposal, but for accreditation, the Committee would need to emphasize widespread involvement.
2. If we do not receive the Title III grant, then the Committee would need to work with faculty, staff, and students to determine whether an “abridged” version of the Title III plan can be implemented with available resources. In this case, the focus of the QEP would be narrower than the Title III plan, but much of the groundwork for the Title III plan could be used in preparing the QEP.
3. If resources are insufficient to support any salient features of the Title III plan, then the Committee will need to engage the campus during Fall 2005 to determine a new QEP focus which can be addressed with available resources.

In either the second or third scenario, an alternative focus might address compliance gaps identified in the Groundwork Stage. Regardless, the actual QEP for presentation to SACS should be prepared during Spring and Summer 2006 for submission on August 15. The QEP Committee must be available during Summer 2006 to incorporate any changes which derive from the off-site review committee’s findings.

Review and Response Stage

The review process begins in May, 2006, with the off-site review of our Compliance Certification.

The **Response Team**, to begin work in Spring 2006, will work with the Leadership Team in preparing the Focused Report, if we decide to submit one, as well as our response to the findings of the on-site review. The Response Team will likely have a composition similar to the Compliance Preparation Task Force, emphasizing knowledge in those areas most needing response. The Response Team must be available over Summer 2006 for preparing the Focused Report.

Within two weeks of the off-site review, the SACS staff will conduct a conference call with the Leadership Team to transmit a verbal summary of the report. In collaboration with the Response Team, the Leadership Team should make a

determination of whether a Focused Report, addressing compliance issues raised by the off-site review, should be prepared. Since the Focused Report must be submitted prior to the on-site review, it needs to be written over Summer 2006. Additionally, the QEP Committee will need to review the findings of the off-site review to determine whether any last minute changes to the QEP are necessary prior to its submission on August 15.

The Site-Visit Arrangements Committee, to begin work in Spring 2006, will work with logistics of the site-visit.

The on-site review occurs in September or October with the purpose of reviewing the QEP and following up on issues generated by the off-site review. Within three to five weeks following the review, the college will receive a draft of the committee report. The Response Team will review the document for factual correctness and report any errors to the review committee, which will make any necessary revisions. The final written report from the review committee will include recommendations regarding any standards with which the college is not in compliance and may make suggestions for improvement as well. The college must respond to all recommendations but is not required to respond to suggestions. The Response Team will prepare a response to the report prior to the Commission's accreditation decision in June, 2007.

Detailed Time Line for Reaffirmation

Fall 2004 Activities

Throughout the Semester

- ✓ The Faculty Senate Planning Committee continues development of the Title III program grant, which will provide a groundwork for the QEP.
- ✓ The Accreditation liaison works with the Leadership Team and Computer Services to design a web site which will serve as a focus for the reaffirmation effort, serving as a means of communication, a means of entering data for the Compliance Certification, and a document library.
- ✓ Institutional Research completes a survey of all presently available documents to be put in the website library.

August, 2004

- ✓ Accreditation Liaison presents reaffirmation plan to faculty and staff.
- ✓ President designates and charges leadership team.

- ✓ Accreditation Liaison presents reaffirmation plan and compliance reporting overview to leadership team.

September, 2004

- ✓ Leadership Team designates a Compliance Preparation Task Force which will review all accreditation standards.
- ✓ Leadership Team and Compliance Preparation Task Force jointly review requirements, identifying and defining any compliance gaps.

October, 2004

- ✓ Compliance Preparation Task Force develops plans for closing any compliance gaps by December 2005 and assigns responsibility for implementing plans.
- ✓ The Leadership Team reviews the program for the December SACS conference in Atlanta and selects appropriate attendees.

November, 2004

- ✓ Implementation of plans for closing gaps begins. Compliance Preparation Task Force takes responsibility for monitoring progress on plans.

December 4-7, 2004

- ✓ SACS Conference in Atlanta.

Spring 2005 Activities**Throughout the Semester**

- ✓ Implementation of gap-closing plans continues as monitored by the Compliance Preparation Task Force.
- ✓ Computer Services completes development of the Reaffirmation Website.
- ✓ Institutional research works with Computer Services to populate the documents library with all relevant material.

Jan. 28, 2005

- ✓ Four members of the Leadership Team attend the SACS Orientation in Atlanta.

January-February, 2005

- ✓ The Offices of Institutional Advancement and Institutional Research, working with the Faculty Senate Planning Committee, complete the Title III proposal.

March 2005

- ✓ The Leadership team designates and charges the Compliance Certification Workgroup, with responsibility for textual preparation of the Compliance Certification. Institutional Research and Computer Services familiarizes the Compliance Certification Workgroup with the website facilities for preparing the Compliance Certification.

March-April, 2005

- ✓ The Compliance Certification Workgroup sets a schedule for documentation of each requirement.
- ✓ Leadership Team and Faculty Senate Planning Committee work with faculty, staff, students, and community to develop potential QEP focus, with attention to the impact of possible Title III outcomes on selection of the QEP topic.

April, 2005

- ✓ Based on probable QEP Focus, the Leadership Team designates and charges a QEP Committee with responsibility for preparing the QEP.
- ✓ The Compliance Certification Workgroup begins preparation of the Compliance Certification, initially focusing on the more complex requirements.

Summer 2005 Activities**Throughout the Semester**

- ✓ The Leadership Team and the QEP Committee jointly finalize the QEP focus.
- ✓ The QEP Committee develops a plan, for implementation in Fall 2005, to engage the campus in preparing the QEP.
- ✓ Implementation of gap-closing plans continues as monitored by the Compliance Preparation Task Force.
- ✓ The Compliance Certification workgroup continues preparation of the Compliance Certification.

Fall 2005 Activities**Throughout the Semester**

- ✓ The Compliance Preparation Task Force completes its mission with all gap-closing plans fully implemented.
- ✓ The QEP Committee seeks campus-wide involvement in planning for the QEP.

September, 2005

- ✓ The Leadership Team designates and charges a Mock Review Team, with responsibility for reviewing the Compliance Certification draft and identifying deficiencies.

October, 2005

- ✓ The Compliance Certification Workgroup completes a draft of the Compliance Certification.
- ✓ Mock Review Team begins evaluation of the Compliance Certification.

November, 2005

- ✓ Based on feedback from the Mock Review Team, the Compliance Certification Workgroup begins revision of the draft Compliance Certification.

Spring 2006 Activities**Throughout the Semester**

- ✓ The QEP Committee completes a draft of the QEP for review by the Leadership Team and the College community.

January, 2006

- ✓ The Mock Review Team completes its mission of fully reviewing the Draft Compliance report.

January-February, 2006

- ✓ The Compliance Certification Workgroup completes the final Compliance Certification, finishing its mission.

March 15, 2006

- ✓ The Leadership Team submits the Compliance Certification to SACS.

April, 2006

- ✓ The Leadership Team designates and charges a Response Team, which will have responsibility for both the Focused Report and Gordon's response to the site visit.
- ✓ The Leadership Team designates and charges a Site Visit Arrangements Committee which will have responsibility for the site visit logistics.

May 15-19

- ✓ Off-site review.

Summer 2006 Activities

Throughout the Semester

- ✓ Site Visit Arrangements committee plans for fall site visit.
- ✓ Final Revisions to QEP.

May-June, 2006

- ✓ The SACS associate director assigned to Gordon gives a verbal report of the Off-Site Review Committee's findings to the leadership team, noting preliminary findings regarding areas of non-compliance.
- ✓ Based on the preliminary findings, a decision is made on producing a Focused Report, which must be prepared prior to the site visit.

Aug 1

- ✓ The college submits the QEP to the Commission.

Fall 2006 Activities

Sept-Oct

- ✓ Site visit to review QEP and areas of non-compliance and other concerns noted by off-site review.

Oct-Nov

- ✓ Response Team reviews the draft report from the Site Visit Review Committee and corrects factual errors.
- ✓ Response Team begins preparation of Gordon's response to the Site Visit Committee's report.

Winter 2007 Activities

Throughout the Semester

- ✓ Response Team prepares and submits Gordon's response to Site Visit Committee's report.

Summer 2007 Activities

June 19-27

- ✓ Commission on Colleges reviews site visit findings and institutional response and takes action on Gordon's reaffirmation.