

**EXCERPT FROM THE PRELIMINARY REPORT
OF THE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE**

Statement Regarding the Report

The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is responsible for making the final determination on reaffirmation of accreditation based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

Name of the Institution: **University of South Carolina - Columbia**

Date of the Review: **November 3-4, 2020**

SACSCOC Staff Member: **Dr. Linda Thomas-Glover**

Chair of the Committee: **Dr. Timothy S. Brophy**
Director, Institutional Assessment
and Professor, Music Education
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32606

7.2 Quality Enhancement Plan

- 7.2 The institution has a QEP that (a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes; (b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies; (c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success; (d) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and (e) includes a plan to assess achievement.
(*Quality Enhancement Plan*)

These comments are made in the understanding of providing helpful suggestions or broad observations and impressions about steps that might be taken by the institution as it finalizes its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for submission to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

It is difficult to say much with confidence and clarity at this point because no concrete QEP plan is presented. What is presented is said to be a summary but appears to be a sketch not of a plan but of how the inchoate plan would be assessed and on what student learning outcomes (SLOs). The anticipated QEP appears to be an elaboration or expansion of the institution's existing QEP.

The most basic difficulty here is that it appears to put the cart before the horse. The materials presented emphasize SLOs--how derived, how assessed, and how mesh with the institution strategic plan. But the reason for being of the QEP is not just to improve SLOs, which would be like teaching to the test. Rather, SLOs are supposed to be partially indicative of some logically prior and more significant instance or element of learning. (While section (c) of the requirement refers to improving SLOs, it is usually thought of, first, as referring to already-active SLOs pre-existing the implementation of the QEP, and second, simply to the need to have the QEP assessed along observable, measurable, objective dimensions.)

More important, the QEP is said to be a deliberate, purposeful expansion, elaboration, or extension of the QEP of the prior reaffirmation. The presented document, however, does not include with it that prior plan itself in detail. Though the prior QEP was acceptable for the earlier reaffirmation, there is not sufficient material presented at this time to make any judgment as to the acceptability of the current QEP-in-progress. Is the proposed QEP a "new" plan or only a "quality enhancement" of an earlier Quality Enhancement Plan? The emphasis on improvement of SLOs from the current plan suggests the latter. Improvement or enhancement beyond the current QEP seem reasonable and could lead to compliance but leaves the proposers with the crucial task of demonstrating that the new QEP is a "substantive change" commensurate with the mission and purpose of the QEP program itself.

Along a similar line, one of the formative aspects of any QEP is that it should arise from an institution-wide felt need or opportunity for improvement—beyond the current situation. In this case, the felt need beyond the status quo is not presented or defined, except perhaps in improving upon the existing QEP, which appears to be insufficiently compelling or appropriate to the *raison d'être* of the QEP requirement. The current plan, that is, *is* the status quo but does not of itself establish an institution-wide felt need.

Nonetheless, the foci on experiential learning and on reflection on the experiential learning in themselves seem suitable for meeting the purpose of the QEP if one sets aside the prior/existing context. Paying particular attention to select student sub-populations seems a useful and important approach. The proposed assessment plan seems reasonable and is likely a continuation of the existing QEP assessment.