

MARCH
22-25

9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
via Microsoft Teams

PREPARING FOR THE 2021

SACSCOC **ON-SITE VISIT**

All you need to know for a successful on-site visit

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Have Questions?

Contact dmiles@email.sc.edu or
803-979-8607 for more information



South Carolina

go.sc.edu/sacscoc

ACCREDITATION BY THE NUMBERS



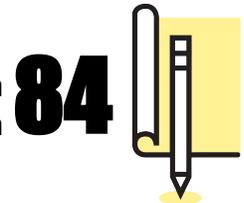
11 states in the SACSCOC region, plus locations abroad

SACSCOC member institutions in the US and abroad



14 sections in the *Principles of Accreditation*

individual narratives written as part of the Compliance Certification



68 standards found compliant during the off-site review

narratives submitted as part of the *Focused Report*



8 reviewers make up the on-site Reaffirmation Committee

miles traveled; this year's review is completely virtual



1 proposal submitted for the Quality Enhancement Plan

ACCREDITATION BASICS

What you need to know about accreditation and the reaffirmation process

ACCREDITATION

The University of South Carolina Columbia is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. We are a candidate for reaffirmation of our accreditation status in 2021.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of accreditation to universities. Regional accreditation is the way that the federal government ensures compliance with federal laws and mandates for higher education as well. Accreditation determines our eligibility to receive federal and state funds, our ability to transfer credits with other schools, and our ability to earn recognition from students, other universities, and the business, non-profit and government communities.

Our SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is Donald Miles, Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation, Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA).

COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

The Compliance Certification is a self-study document completed by the institution demonstrating the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements and other standards in the *Principles of Accreditation*.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee conducts the initial review of this document and presents preliminary findings to the institution and the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

The university submitted its Compliance Certification to SACSCOC in September 2020 and received feedback in early November.

FOCUSED REPORT

The purpose of the Focused Report is to address areas of concern identified by the Off-Site Committee. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee found the university non-compliant in 15 areas of the Compliance Certification, including, but not limited to, those related to the assessment of administrative effectiveness, assessment of academic programs, physical resources, and institutional environment.

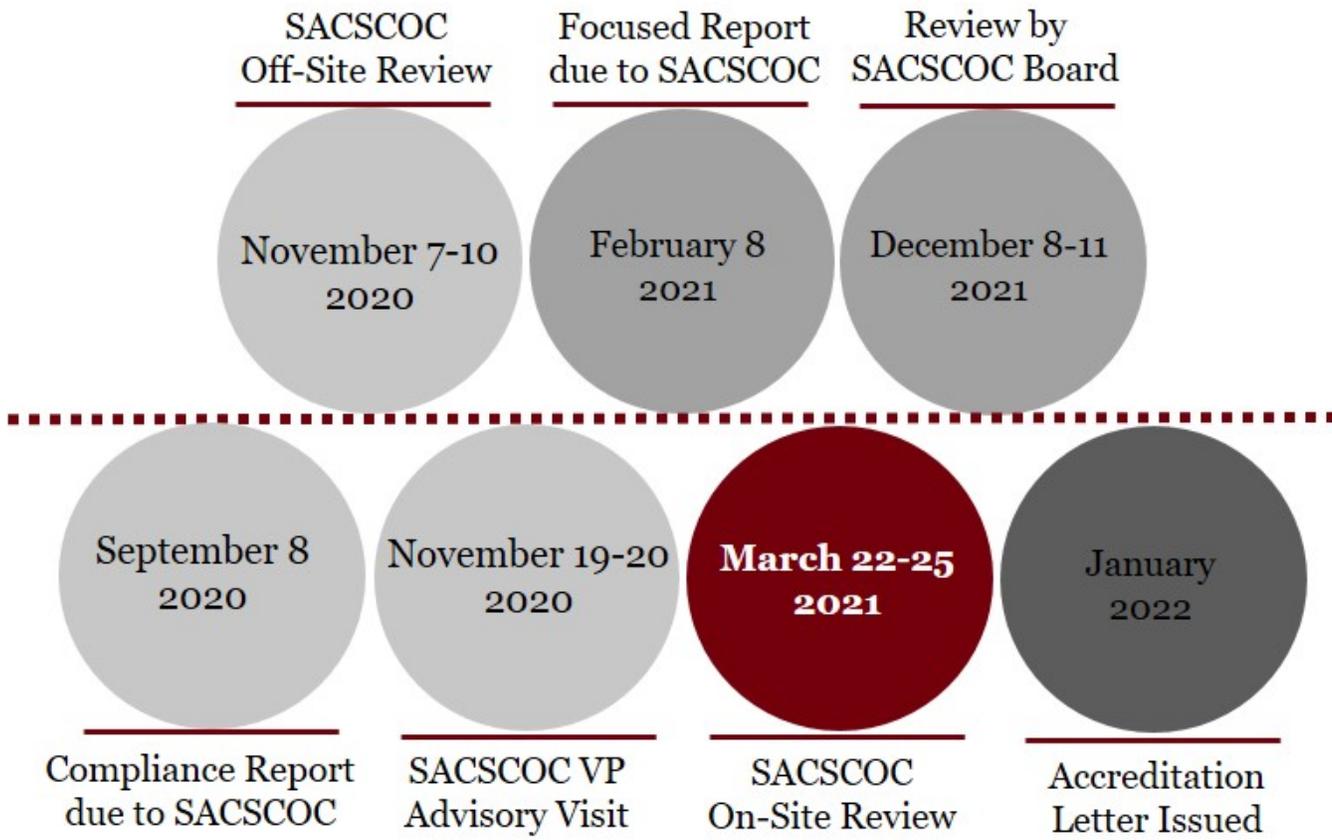
The Focused Report was submitted in February of 2021 and included targeted narratives and hundreds of pages of additional documentation.

ON-SITE VISIT

The university's on-site review will take place from March 22-25. The on-site visit typically consists of a team of reviewers, called the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, visiting our campuses and sites to meet with key individuals in person; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's visit will be completely virtual. The On-Site Committee is made up of a different, equally qualified, group of individuals from the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The Committee has two goals:

- 1) To clear up any lingering questions related to the Compliance Certification
- 2) Ensure the university is compliant with all key areas of accreditation as required by the United States Department of Education
- 3) Review the QEP and provide feedback

Over the course of the visit, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will meet with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and members of the Board of Trustees. The number one goal of the Committee is to be sure the institution is fulfilling its mission in relation to student learning via compliance with SACSCOC standards outlined in



the *Principles of Accreditation*.

The Committee will virtually visit the regional Palmetto College campuses on March 22nd. On March 23rd and 24th, the Committee will meet with faculty, staff, and administrators to ensure compliance with the standards required by the US Department of Education. They will also meet with students, faculty and staff to discuss the QEP.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will present its findings to institutional representatives during the exit conference. These findings will include any recommendations related to standards for which the institution has not yet demonstrated compliance; the chair usually reads any recommendations without discussion.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Within three to four weeks following the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee’s visit, the chair will send our institution a draft of the committee report to review for factual errors. The final report, titled *Report of the Reaffirmation Committee*, is received about one month after the visit. At this time, the institution is required to

respond to all recommendations cited by the committee. The institution’s response and copies of its Quality Enhancement Plan are usually due five months after the committee’s visit is concluded.

A Committee on Compliance and Reports (C&R), one of the standing committees of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, will receive and review the *Report of the Reaffirmation Committee* and the response of the institution to the committee’s report. The Executive Council and the full SACSCOC Board of Trustees will receive the C&R Committee report and will make a decision regarding the institution’s accreditation and any follow-up activities that it requires of the institution. 🌿



GETTING TO KNOW THE QEP

Experience by Design

INTRODUCTION

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is an integral component of the reaffirmation process and is derived from an institution's ongoing comprehensive planning and evaluation processes. In general, QEPs are expected to focus on improving student learning and/or student success.

The QEP is a document developed by the institution that (1) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes; (2) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies; (3) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success; (4) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and (5) includes a plan to assess achievement.

TOPIC SELECTION

In February 2021, the University of South Carolina Columbia and the four regional Palmetto College branch campuses (Lancaster, Salkehatchie, Sumter, and Union), submitted its QEP to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. Titled *Experience by Design*, our QEP focuses on beyond the classroom (BTC) engagement and reflection for all students, with emphasis on supporting student populations with lower-than-expected graduation/retention rates, and that are also found to be less engaged. The QEP will be coordinated by the Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning (CIEL) with extensive collaborative partnerships between the Columbia and Palmetto College campuses and across academic affairs, student affairs, and information technology units.

Experience by Design expands the theme of the university's previous QEP, USC Connect. USC Connect focused on integrative learning in the context of a) making connections within and beyond the classroom and b) solving problems through solution-oriented thinking; the decision to expand upon this theme was made in the spring of 2019.

During the summer of 2019, a QEP Development Committee originating from the USC Connect QEP began discussions about the new QEP in 2018 through reviews of the successful SACSCOC five-year report, institutional

strategic planning documents, and CIEL's longitudinal programmatic data.

By fall of 2019, five QEP subcommittees were created to further advance a comprehensive plan for finalizing a QEP topic. Faculty members were selected via the protocol established by the university's Faculty Senate, and staff members were chosen for expertise related to their committee's focus. A primary goal of each subcommittee was to generate recommendations determining how best to support an evolving initiative focused on engagement and reflection.

The topic selection emerged from review of institutional planning documents (including the recently established strategic plan and key findings from our earlier efforts), extensive outreach, QEP subcommittee activities, examination of scholarly literature and institutional best practices.

Information about the new QEP was communicated to constituents in a variety of arenas that left ample room for feedback. Two QEP forums provided a virtual and physical space for individuals to share their opinions about the direction of the QEP, as well as to help bring awareness to upcoming SACSCOC accreditation processes. Student meetings provided similar information in a focus group format with more emphasis placed upon perceived value of beyond the classroom experiences and potential barriers to completion.

Based upon more than ten student meetings about QEP development, students expressed excitement about the topic and the opportunity to enhance their traditional academic curriculum with experiences extending into beyond the classroom environments.

GOALS

The overarching goal for *Experience by Design* is to enhance beyond-the-classroom engagement and reflection for all students. Engagements have been shown to improve student success and reflection on those engagements deepens the impact. The university's own institutional data shows that student groups with lower graduation and

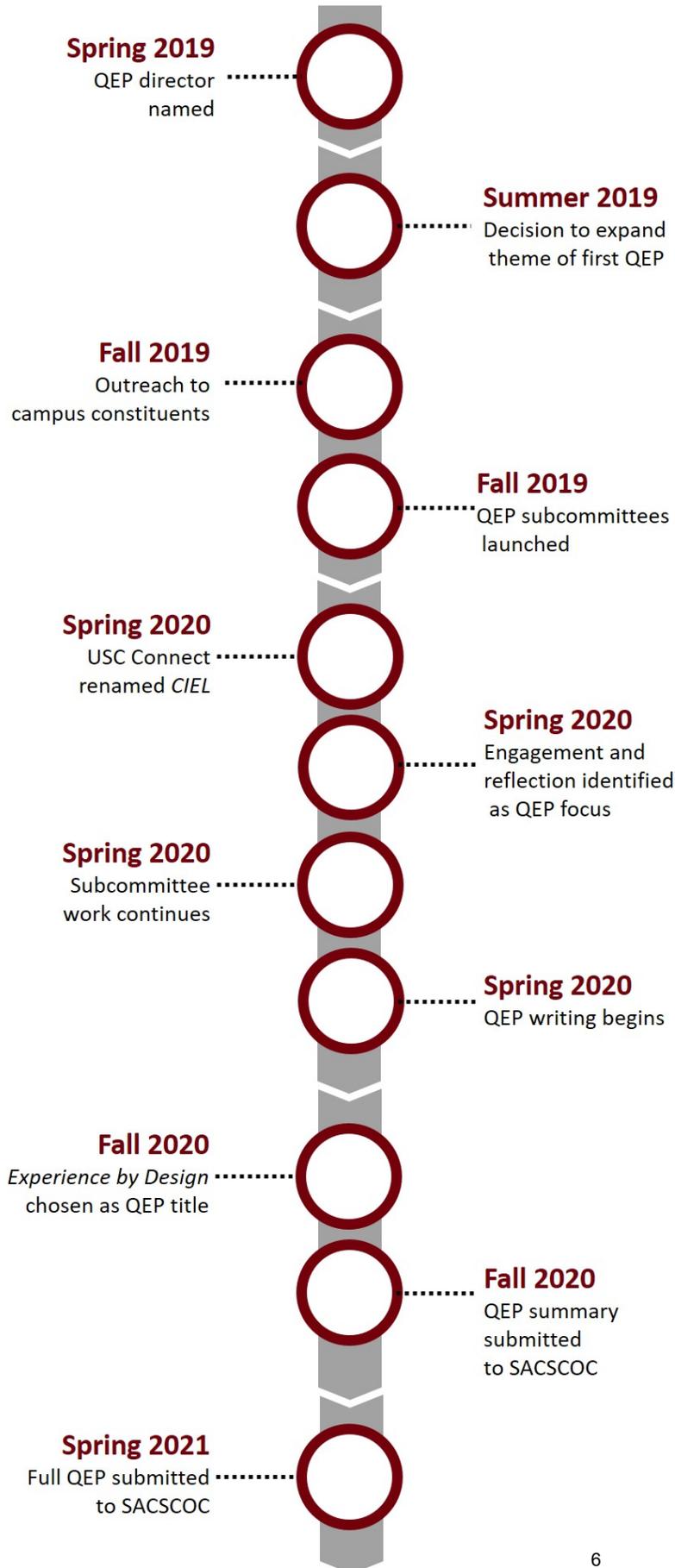
retention rates also have lower rates of beyond the classroom engagement. *Experience by Design* focuses on those student populations, including engaging Pell-eligible, transfer, underrepresented minority, and male students.

Performance across identified student learning outcomes and student success metrics will be documented, regularly reviewed, and acted upon so that the institution can continually address QEP goals and adapt to the changing higher education environment. QEP efforts will focus on:

- An emphasis on interventions (e.g., customized BTC engagements, reflection opportunities, funding for beyond the classroom experiences) and associated targeted marketing (e.g., social media campaigns and events) for specific student populations.
- Supporting students in developing reflection skills based upon their university experiences and to think about these skills in connection with academic, personal, and professional goals.
- Support for faculty and staff in developing and expanding BTC engagement and reflection opportunities across curricular and co-curricular settings that are inclusive and impactful.
- Exploring relationships between engagement and student success metrics (e.g., retention, graduation rates, employment) as well as linkages to student learning on reflection.

With a goal to enhance student learning and student success through a) quality beyond the classroom experiences originating from curricular and co-curricular environments; b) targeted interventions with specific student subpopulations; and c) an emphasis on reflection to advance students' understanding of experiences in the context of personal, professional, and academic goals, *Experience by Design* plays a key role in supporting the 2020 strategic plan and demonstrating the powerful benefits of a degree from the University of South Carolina Columbia and the regional Palmetto College campuses. 🏆

PATH TO SUBMISSION



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE HOSTING AN ON-SITE VISIT

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will virtually visit the Columbia and Palmetto College branch campuses March 22-25 to review facilities and meet with students, staff, faculty, administrators, and the Board of Trustees.

TOP FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1) The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee is composed of highly qualified experts from peer institutions similar in size and scope to UofSC Columbia. The number one goal of the Committee is to ensure the university is fulfilling its mission to educate students.
- 2) SACSCOC does not provide the Committee a list of questions; the Committee develops their own questions based on the materials provided by the university in the Compliance Certification, Focused Report, and information gained during the visit itself.
- 3) A member of OIRAA staff will be present at the beginning of each meeting to assist with technical issues and introduce the attendees.
- 4) Everyone will be asked about the QEP; brush up using the information on page 5.
- 5) Always be honest and act with integrity; if you do not know the answer to a question, simply say you do not know and pass the question to a member of OIRAA staff after the meeting.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR:

FACULTY, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATORS

Participants in the sessions for the Department of Education standards should expect very specific questions related to the topic at hand.

Prepare by reviewing the narrative and all supporting documentation submitted during the Compliance Certification and the Focused Report (if applicable). Be sure to read and understand the guidelines published in the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* for your area. Feel free to have documentation and notes on hand during the call-- but do not try to predict questions or draft answers ahead of time.

You may be asked to provide additional documentation; if this happens, let a member of OIRAA staff know what has been requested. OIRAA will collect the materials and facilitate delivery to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

STUDENTS

Students should expect questions related to the student experience, including the QEP. Be prepared to describe student life at the university, including but not limited to: advising, campus facilities (classrooms, labs, libraries, athletics), campus dining, Greek life, health and wellness services, career services, and student organizations.

You may also be asked about your major, why you chose your major, and challenges you've faced as a UofSC student.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees should expect broad questions about the following:

- 1) Ways in which the university fulfills its mission
- 2) How governing structure and lines of responsibility are followed
- 3) The QEP

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ON-SITE VISIT

The "dos" and the "don'ts"

DO



- Prepare in advance by reviewing materials and documentation
- Let the SACSCOC team set the pace of the interview
- Listen carefully to the question being asked and tailor your answer
- Be thorough in your response, but concise
- Answer all questions honestly and to the best of your ability
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question
- Let the Committee (and OIRAA) know if you can't answer a question
- Download the MS Teams app to your computer or phone in advance
- Keep yourself on mute unless you're speaking
- Keep your camera on throughout the entire interview
- Minimize background noise and distractions
- Use the "raise your hand" button if you have something to say
- Let OIRAA know immediately if you have technical issues or will be late to a meeting
- Be honest and be yourself
- Remain professional, cordial and respectful
- Plan to be early

DON'T



- Provide information not specifically requested by members of the Committee
- Volunteer information on matters about which you may not be entirely informed
- Chat or make small talk with the reviewers
- Interrupt
- Leave your microphone on if you are not speaking
- Criticize or blame others
- Make excuses
- Make negative comments
- Gossip
- Lie or misrepresent anything
- Treat the interview casually
- Be unprepared
- Talk or text on your phone
- Answer emails
- Use a lot of acronyms without context
- Give one or two word answers
- Be late

MEET THE SACSCOC ON-SITE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE

The committee is made up of eight members and will visit campus virtually March 22-25.

SACSCOC VICE PRESIDENT



Linda Thomas-Glover

Dr. Linda Thomas-Glover joined the staff of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges in 2019 after serving as president of Eastern Shore Community College, located on Virginia's Eastern Shore for ten years. Dr. Thomas-Glover previously served as Provost/Chief Academic Officer at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College (Kentucky). Prior to that position she held several positions at Guilford Technical Community College (North Carolina) including Vice President of Instruction, Science/ Mathematics Division Chair, Physical Sciences Department Chair, and she began her teaching career as an Assistant Professor in Chemistry at Bennett College. Her academic credentials include a BS degree in chemistry from South Carolina State University, a MS degree in Medicinal

Chemistry from the State University of New York at Buffalo and she earned a doctorate in chemistry from Temple University (Philadelphia, PA).

ON-SITE COMMITTEE CHAIR



Laurie Casteen

Dr. Laurie Casteen has over 25 years experience working in higher education. She is the Associate Dean of Students at the University of Virginia. Her academic credentials include a BA degree in French Language and Literature from Bates College, a MEd degree in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education and doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Virginia. Dr. Casteen was inducted into the Raven Society in 2004 and has served as a faculty nomination committee co-chair from 2007-2017. She has been a volunteer on the Charlottesville Police Foundation steering committee since 2014.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE



Dr. Linda Page Bachman - QEP
Associate Director Residence Life
Emory University



Dr. Carol Burton
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Western Carolina University



Dr. Mark Keenum
President
Mississippi State University



Dr. Paul R. Kittle, Jr.
Senior Associate Vice President
for Student Affairs
The University of Texas at
Arlington



Dr. Tisha Paredes
Asst. Vice President IE and
Assessment
Old Dominion University



Dr. Jorge Perez
Associate Vice President for IE
University of Tennessee System

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Still have questions? We have answers!

Q: What is the on-site team and why are they here?

A: The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, casually referred to as the "on-site team," is a committee of eight experts from peer institutions in the SACSCOC region. Their goal is to ensure UofSC Columbia is in compliance with SACSCOC accreditation standards, particularly those in areas required by the US Department of Education, and evaluate the QEP. You can find a detailed list of members on page 9.

Q: Is the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee actually qualified to evaluate our university?

A: Absolutely. Each member of the Committee is an expert in their field and works at a school similar to UofSC Columbia in size and scope.

Q: When is this visit taking place?

A: The on-site visit will take place from Monday, March 22 to Thursday, March 25. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting will be entirely virtual.

Q: What kind of questions will I be asked?

A: This depends on your role. Students will be asked questions about their educational and extracurricular experiences at UofSC and the QEP. Members of the Board of Trustees will be asked questions about the university, its mission and governance, and the QEP. Faculty, staff, and administrators will be asked questions specific to their areas of involvement and the *Principles of Accreditation*. The Committee can also develop questions based on what you discuss during the meetings.

Q: Is there any way to know the questions in advance?

A: No. Faculty, staff, and administrators can prepare by reviewing materials submitted as part of the Compliance Certification and Focused Report. Students can prepare by reflecting on their experiences as a UofSC student. Everyone can prepare by reviewing key information related to the QEP. Remember that anything you say during the meeting could result in follow-up questions from the Committee.

Q: What will the meetings be like?

A: A member of OIRAA staff will start the meeting, introduce the participants and ensure all technology is functioning correctly. The remainder of the session will consist of a conversation between the Committee members and our university's representatives (you).

Q: What should I do if I do not know the answer to a question?

A: That's okay! If you do not know the answer to a question, write the question down and tell the Committee you do not know the answer. Then, pass the question on to a member of OIRAA staff and they will assist.

Q: What should I do if I have technical problems?

A: Don't panic! If you have technical problems, get in touch with a member of OIRAA staff immediately. You can find their contact information on page 13.

Q: What should I do if there's an emergency?

A: If you have an emergency and will be late or miss a meeting, contact a member of OIRAA staff as soon as possible.

Q: What is the most important thing to know?

A: The ultimate goal of the reaffirmation process is to ensure the university is fulfilling its mission to educate students. It is a positive experience that will help the university remain a leader in higher education.

SCHEDULE

The On-Site Visit will take place virtually March 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 25th.

DAY ONE: Monday, March 22

- 9:00am – 9:30am** Committee orientation
Agenda: team building, orientation of committee, review of assignments, and review of schedule
- 9:45am – 9:55am** Welcome from President Caslen
- 10:00am – 1:35pm** Review of Regional Palmetto College branch campuses and dual enrollment sites
- 1:35pm – 2:00pm** Committee breaks for lunch
- 2:00pm – 5:00pm** Review of Regional Palmetto College branch campuses and dual enrollment sites

DAY TWO: Tuesday, March 23

- 9:00am – 9:45am** Committee orientation
Agenda: team building, orientation of committee, review of assignments, and review of schedule
- 10:00am – 10:30am** Meet and greet session with institution's Leadership Team
President Caslen and Committee chair will facilitate introductions plus an overview of college and committee's work
- 10:45am – 3:00pm** Committee conducts interviews and brings closure to non-compliance issues where possible and DOE Standards
- 3:00pm – 3:45pm** Institution provides presentation on QEP
- 4:00pm – 5:00pm** Committee meets in Executive Session to assess progress and review next day's schedule/focus

DAY THREE: Wednesday, March 24

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 8:30am – 9:45am | QEP topic identification and QEP broad-based support of constituents. |
| 9:55am – 10:40am | Student Learning Outcomes and Student Success |
| 10:50am – 11:35am | QEP Resource commitment |
| 11:45am – 12:30pm | QEP Assessment plan |
| 12:30pm – 1:00pm | Committee break |
| 1:00pm – 1:30pm | Committee Chair, Committee CEO and SACSCOC Staff Representative meet with governing board representatives. Committee members meet with select students (group 1) |
| 1:35pm – 2:05pm | Committee members meet with select students (group 2) |
| 2:10pm – 3:20pm | Committee continues with interviews as needed for areas of non-compliance or Department of Education Standards |
| 3:30pm – 4:00pm | Executive Session |
| 4:00pm – 4:30pm | Chair and Staff Representative update President Caslen |
| 4:30pm – 5:00pm | Committee meets in Executive Session to complete draft report and exit conference plans |

DAY FOUR: Thursday, March 25

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 8:30 am – 8:45am | Review draft report and exit conference details |
| 9:00am – 9:15am | Chair and SACSCOC Staff member meet with President |
| 9:15am | Exit conference |

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact Us!

If you need technological assistance before or during a session, or if you will be late to or miss a scheduled session, contact a member of OIRAA staff.

PRIMARY CONTACT

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