As members of the university, many of you have now (i.e., Post-SACSCOC on-site visit and everything leading up to it over the last year and a half) have – I should hope, a basic understanding of the significance of the types (e.g.: Core Requirements [CR], Comprehensive Standard [CS] and Federal Requirement [FR]) of SACSCOC standards and what they require. You may also know a little about the responsibilities of off-site teams and on-site teams. Likewise, you may be somewhat familiar with the three key SACSCOC documents to which I have often alluded in this column and which may continue to be helpful to you to understand points still to be made in this and future columns:


To the extent that you were directly involved with the last year and a half’s SACSCOC activities, you may also have some knowledge of how best to interpret the standards as they impact our university. In Assessment in practice, Trudy Banta, the doyenne of higher education assessment, asserts that “student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsi-
bility...assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement [Banta, TW, Lund JP, Black KE and Oblander, FW. (1996). *Assessment in practice: putting principles to work on college campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p 35]. So, in a continuation of the SACSCOC MATTERS column – because the more we know about accreditation, the “better-informed attention to student learning” we can provide - I will now attempt a more fine-grained explanation of several key standards. In today’s column, I will address comprehensive standard 3.3.1.

SACSCOC standard 3.3.1 comprises a portfolio of five constituent standards addressing – and this is important, institutional effectiveness in preordained areas or units of compliance, viz.:

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: *(Institutional effectiveness)*

3.3.1.1. educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
3.3.1.2. administrative support services
3.3.1.3. academic and student support services
3.3.1.4. research within its mission, if appropriate
3.3.1.5. community/public service within its mission, if appropriate.

As highlighted below, the following SACSCOC table dramatically underscores the oft-found noncompliance nature of these institutional effectiveness standards, e.g. for CS 3.3.1.1, 64%, 36%, and 21%, respectively from the initial Off-Site Review through the intermediate On-Site Review ultimately to the C&R Review. For me, it also underscores the significance of both institutional documentary preparedness as well as institution-to-On-Site-review committee communication within the stepwise accrediting process. [BTW: C&R Review is conducted by the Committees on Compliance and Reports (C & R), which is a 64-member standing committees of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Among other things, it the reviews reports prepared by peer committees and the institutional responses to those reports. A C&R Committee’s recommendation regarding an institution’s reaffirmation of accreditation is forwarded to the Executive Council for review. C&R Committees make one of the following recommendations:

1. Reaffirmation of accreditation
2. Denial of reaffirmation
3. Removal from membership.

Then, the Executive Council recommends action to the full SACSCOC Board of Trustees which makes the final decision on reaffirmation and any follow-up activities that it requires of an institution. *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation*, pp. 64-65, passim]
As demonstrated, the 3.3.1 standards are problematical for most institutions, which is the reason that SACSCOC itself takes such pains to elucidate IE compliance processes in its publications and in the many IE workshops conducted at its conferences. Based on my experience as an On-Site SACSCOC IE evaluator, many factors impactful successful 3.3.1 compliance. However, they can all be mollified simply by addressing all parts of the standard. In the Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation (pp 83-84), SACSCOC has very conveniently parsed each 3.3.1 standard into its parts as noted by the bolded and underscored keywords below:

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas (Institutional Effectiveness):

3.3.1.1 Educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
3.3.1.2 Administrative support services
3.3.1.3 Educational support services
3.3.1.4 Research within its educational mission, if appropriate
3.3.1.5 Community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate

In the “Glossary and Reference Guide” to the Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation (p.115ff), SACSCOC does define “educational program,” but not the other bolded and underscored keywords. Consequently, we are left to our own subjective interpretation or to scouring other SACSCOC sources as needed for additional enlightenment. This is a critical juncture, because as the Handbook avers,
Understanding the Standard

Like all good processes everywhere, the process of developing a Compliance Certification begins with establishing a foundation of understanding. Even the most diligent and conscientious writers will fail to develop a convincing argument for compliance if they do not first understand the meaning of the standard within the context of an institution with their unique mission. (p 24)

Therefore, I suggest examining the three key SACSCOC documents alluded to above for any and all interpretative information. All three documents are useful in this regard, especially the Resource Manual, which is organized to provide insights into each standard by means of the following:

Rationale and Notes
The rationale and notes provide a further explanation of the standard/requirement along with reasons for its inclusion in the Principles.

Relevant Questions for Consideration
For each standard or requirement, there is a series of questions designed to help an institution examine its current processes and practices.

Documentation, if applicable
Evidence that should be examined by the institution and provided as part of the documentation of its case of compliance with the requirement/standard. (Does not apply to all standards.)

Reference to Commission Documents, if applicable (p. 2)

Additionally, SACSCOC indicates that:

an institution’s primary resource, however, is its Commission staff member assigned to provide advice and to consult with the institution regarding the accreditation process, its expectations and applications. Such advice and information do not supplant the peer review process, but rather provide additional insight in assisting institutions reaching informed judgments about their self-assessment. (p. 2)

Having utilized these authoritative sources to galvanize our understanding of the standards, we may also examine other less authoritative sources found online, e.g. Googling “SACSCOC 3.3.1,” will generate a long menu of other universities’s Compliance Certification or Focused Report responses to this standard. Be forewarned, however, that those non-authoritative sources may or may not have interpreted the standard correctly.

For those deans and directors involved in departmental assessment under the auspices of the Office
of the Provost’s Planning and Evaluation Coordinating Council (PECC), a nascent culture of assessment may already be engrained. From those deans and directors, trickle-down assessment may have hopefully reached much deeper into the university’s organizational culture. In any event, most individuals will be familiar with the following 7-step continuous improvement circle (CIC), which I helped revise in 2010 from my earlier 4-step model. As illustrated below, the CIC is basically an iconographic representation of the SACSCOC IE standard to which I mapped its wording: to generate our seven-step CIC, which – after all, is only a visual processflow, I disaggregated the assessment steps intuited from the 3.3.1.1 standard, viz.:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in the following area: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes. (Institutional Effectiveness).
Then, to operationalize the CIC without being overly discursive, one might tabularize input, such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify Measurement Instrument(s) (step 2)</th>
<th>Data Gathered/Analyzed (steps 3-4)</th>
<th>Implement Data-driven Improvement Plan (steps 5-6)</th>
<th>Evaluate resultant Improvement(s) (step 7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect your data on a survey, feedback loop, etc.</td>
<td>Analyze your data</td>
<td>In response to data, the Career Services department decided to....</td>
<td>As a result of this data-driven improvement, the xxx department was better able to .... By xxxx date, xxx department will do xxx, to improve data by xx% or XX number (whatever metric you choose to use).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SACSCOC is not prescriptive, and does not particular care how an institution provides evidence that it complies with its standards. However, as an evaluator, I often see tables used to consistently summarize IE processes for all campuses and delivery modalities across programs. As an exemplar, Nick Riggs has kindly allowed me to use his recent PECC presentation’s assessment plans, which model the use of tables to succinctly record CIC (and, hence IE-requisite) processes:

**THE INSTITUTE FOR LEGAL STUDIES**

**Paralegal Studies Program Continuous Improvement Actions 2011 – 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Reason for Action Taken</th>
<th>Result of Change</th>
<th>Continuing Improvement Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB, LC, FBK</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>A review of Program Level SLOs in other Paralegal Studies programs across the country and in other academic programs within Sullivan University revealed that the PLS program was too-heavy with 12 SLOs. It was determined by various program constituencies that the program’s SLOs needed to be revamped and narrowed.</td>
<td>Through the efforts of the Legal Studies advisory boards, PLS faculty, and others in the legal community, the Program Level SLOs were narrowed down to the following: Graduates of The Institute for Legal Studies will possess nine competencies: 1. Identify and assess ethical and professional responsibility issues. 2. Define and use legal terminology. 3. Differentiate federal and state court structure and procedures. 4. Conduct factual investigations in an organized manner. 5. Conduct legal research in an organized manner. 6. Analyze and interpret the law in an organized manner. 7. Prepare legal documents, including pleadings, memoranda and legally operative forms. 8. Demonstrate strong communication and interpersonal skills appropriate for the legal field. 9. Use legal technology and determine its impact on the practice of law.</td>
<td>The Program Level SLOs will continue to be tweaked as needed to meet the needs of students, the paralegal profession and the legal community. Program Level SLOs affected: #1 through #9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In their Evaluator Training Module: MODULE 4: FOUNDATIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS (http://www.sacscoc.org/trngmods/IEModules.pdf), SACSCOC lists three institutional effective Case Analysis Factors (CAF). CAF 1 – “Knowing and Understanding the Language of The Principles of Accreditation,” represents what SACSCOC wants its volunteer IE evaluators to know. Accordingly, it is paramount that we who generate documents to support the university’s compliance with SACSCOC standards be equally knowledgeable and understanding. Therefore - in conclusion, “Think like a SACSCOC reviewer,” that is: know the standard’s IE requirements, address all parts of the IE standard, and follow all the stated IE processes including the ever-critical “closing the loop” on the prior year’s improvements.

I hope the coaching provided by this article has been helpful. If additional insights are needed, please let me know.