Our most important job is to help our students succeed!

SACSCOC is Coming—1 Year and Counting

We are quickly approaching the one-year mark in our countdown to submission of our SACSCOC Compliance Report for reaccreditation. That means this is our last year to get a complete set of assessment reports submitted and compiled before we submit our report. The Compliance Report is due September 7, 2022, and the site visit is scheduled for February 28-March 2, 2023.

This year, we are asking you to do the following:

- Review and update your assessment guidebooks. Submit your updated assessment guidebooks to Patty Flowers (pflowers@utm.edu) with your annual assessment reports.
- As you prepare your annual assessment reports, please take some time to look back over your reports from the previous 2-3 years. If you indicated on earlier reports that you were planning to make changes based on the data you analyzed, make sure there is a follow-up of some kind that addresses those earlier plans and describes what happened when you implemented those plans. (For example, if 2018’s report indicated that you were going to implement a particular instructional strategy in the next year, then if you have not already done so in a subsequent report, this year you need to describe what happened when you implemented that strategy.)
- On the other hand, if your assessment reports have consistently indicated that you are continuing to meet your goals and that no further action is needed, then the message that is sending to our reviewers is that you are satisfied with the status quo and are not striving for continuous improvement. In this year’s report, please consider options for continuous improvement. Raising your expectations, setting higher goals, or addressing different issues with new goals are examples of ways you can demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement.
- In this year’s report, please make sure you clearly describe whether your student learning outcomes and unit goals were “met” or “not met.”
- Submit your annual assessment reports on time. (And submitting your reports early would be greatly appreciated!)

Program Assessment Reports, General Education Assessment Reports, and Academic Program Assessment Guidebook updates are due November 1, 2021.

Administrative Support Unit Assessment Reports and Assessment Guidebook updates are due December 31, 2021.

Student Affairs Assessment Reports and Assessment Guidebook updates are due June 30, 2022.

Name Changes for Watermark Software

Watermark, the software company that owns Digital Measures and EvaluationKIT, is in the process of integrating and streamlining their six most popular software packages to enable colleges and universities to better utilize the software and glean insights from their data. To that end, Watermark has renamed these software packages in order to capture the main purpose of each package (effective July 1). For us, that means that we need to learn a couple of new names for the tools we use:

- Digital Measures by Watermark is now called “Watermark Faculty Success.”
• EvaluationKIT by Watermark is now called “Watermark Course Evaluations and Surveys.” Watermark is continuing to upgrade all of their software packages in ways designed to improve user interfaces. You’ll continue to see incremental changes within the software, but the biggest change right now is the name.

*Scenes from the 2021 SACSCOC Summer Institute*

The 2021 SACSCOC Summer Institute was held virtually July 19-22. Among the usual sessions focusing on the preparation of the Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs), Compliance Reports, and Fifth Year Reports, there were sessions scattered throughout the conference that focused on facilitating and improving student engagement and learning. One such session was hosted by Dr. Tony Holland, Director for the Instructional Leadership Academy at Alabama Community College System.

Dr. Holland’s session focused on closing student achievement gaps and facilitating student learning by focusing on instructional leadership for faculty. He touted the importance of providing training, accountability, support, and encouragement to faculty in order to reduce what he calls the “instructional effectiveness gap,” a term used to describe the differences between the most effective and least effective faculty. He advocated:

- introducing all faculty to research-based, effective instructional strategies through sustained, long-term training programs;
- holding faculty accountable by requiring faculty to implement a certain number of new-to-them instructional strategies (which strategies to implement were left to the individual faculty members to choose) and track the corresponding changes in student learning;
- supporting faculty in implementing those strategies by providing tools, information, etc. they needed to make the changes while acknowledging that (1) not all strategies are effective for all faculty, and (2) mistakes will be made in the process, and faculty should not be penalized for mistakes made in the pursuit of instructional excellence; and
- encouraging faculty to step out of their comfort zone by trying new instructional strategies, and publicly recognizing faculty when they are successful in those efforts.

One striking comment during his session addressed the notion of *academic integrity*. Usually, that phrase is associated with student conduct and performance, most often when violations occur. Dr. Holland pointed out that academic integrity should also apply to faculty and staff in the sense that, if we are aware of issues that are affecting student performance and learning, then we have the responsibility to address those issues whenever possible. To ignore the issues or to allow the situations to continue is morally unacceptable and thus a violation of academic integrity. In the classroom, this means that faculty should do everything in their power to facilitate student learning—including providing students the support they need to understand new content and to fill in gaps in previous knowledge that they may have. Outside of the classroom, this means that we should find ways to identify and address barriers to student success.

This Fall semester is going to be unlike any other we have ever experienced. We have not one, but two years of students who will be “new” to our campus and our classrooms. All of our students, especially our freshmen and sophomores, will have learning gaps that will need to be addressed. They will also have higher levels of anxiety, mental fatigue, and emotional stress due to the ongoing pandemic, heightened awareness of family health and wellness, and other social issues, which will affect their performance in the classroom. Your leadership and continuing partnership with them in their educational journey is more important now than it has ever been in the past. We encourage you to think about your experiences with students, identify areas that you already know will be stumbling blocks, and ask yourself “What am I going to do about it?” Then make a difference—to do otherwise is unacceptable.