

**School of Graduate Studies
North Carolina A & T State University
SACS 2010 Reaffirmation Subcommittee on Graduate
Education
2008 Faculty Summer Project A**



Submitted By:

Dr. Tyra Turner Whittaker, LPC, CRC, BCPCC

June 30, 2008

Purpose

The overall purpose of Project A was to solicit assistance from a faculty in the School of Education to focus on two specific tasks: 1) review graduate level course objectives for measurable evidence that the courses are progressively more advanced than the undergraduate program and, 2) document that the course provides an opportunity for independent learning.

Project Overview

SACS principle 3.6.1 states: “the institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, master’s and doctoral degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs.” Principle 3.6.2 states: “the institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.”

In documenting the University’s compliance with SACS Principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2, the SACS 2010 Reaffirmation Subcommittee on Graduate Education will review the course syllabi for 500 level undergraduate courses and all graduate level courses offered at NC A&T. Faculty whose courses are not in compliance will be provided exemplary models to use as a guide to strengthen their course syllabus. Based on the number of course syllabi that are found not to be in compliance with SACS principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2, additional strategies will be developed to provide support to help faculty improve their course learning objectives.

Project Deliverables

Project A consisted of the following two deliverables: a) to identify courses that currently meet the SACS standards and those that are not in compliance and 2) to identify course syllabi that are exemplary models of meeting SACS principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2. Additionally, the project identified courses that fostered Independent Learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.”

A total of 147 (n=147) syllabi were submitted. Of the number submitted, a total of 139 (n=139) were usable in this study. A synopsis of the usable syllabi by college/school is as follows:

Name of College or School	#Usable Syllabi
School Of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences	54
School of Business & Economics	8
College of Engineering	0
College of Arts & Sciences	46
School of Education	31
School of Technology	0
College of Nursing	0

In order to create a standardized rubric for assessing each syllabus, the standards from several accreditation bodies were evaluated including the Southern Association for the Accreditation of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE). The evaluation of these standards resulted in the development of three primary and 14 secondary key indicators.

Identify Courses That Currently Meet SACS Standards and Those That Are Not In Compliance

SACS principle 3.6.1 states: “the institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, master’s and doctoral degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs.” To assess these criteria, syllabi were rated as either Less Advanced or More Advanced thereby indicating the courses that were in compliance with SACS standards. Key indicators were rated as either Yes (n=1) or No (n=0). A total of sixty (n=60) syllabi were rated as "more advanced/meets SACS standards" and seventy-nine (n=79) were rated as "less advanced/ does not meet SACS standards". Specific results for this deliverable are as follows:

Key Indicators for More Advanced Academic Content	Raw Score (Yes Ratings)	Percentage
a. Learning objectives cover disciplinary knowledge reflective of the course description and title. (m)	71	51%
b. Various types of goals and outcomes are listed and worded in a way that graduate students can easily understand. (n)	76	54%
c. There is clear logic for the integration of learning outcomes through the course. (o)	79	56%
d. Learning objectives are measurable. (p)	75	53%
e. Learning objectives contain verbage indicating higher level learning according to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (i.e. synthesize, explain, differentiate, judge) (q) ¹	79	57%

A syllabus had to receive a "Yes" rating on all secondary key indicators to receive a Yes on the overall primary rating. Information about specific syllabi and corresponding ratings are located in Appendix C. Digitally submitted syllabi also contain specific ratings and are located on a USB Port.

¹ The letters at the end of each secondary indicator correspond with the letters on the Excel spreadsheet. Ratings are listed per course in Excel.

Identify Course Syllabi That Are Exemplary Models Of Meeting SACS Principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.

The second charge of the current Project was to *Identify Course Syllabi That Are Exemplary Models Of Meeting SACS Principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.* To assess this criterion, syllabi were rated as either "Non Exemplary" or "Exemplary" thereby indicating the courses that exceeded SACS standards. Secondary key indicators were rated as either Yes (n=1) or No (n=0). A total of forty-two (n=42) syllabi were rated as "more advanced/meets SACS standards" and ninety-seven (n=97) were rated as "less advanced/ does not meet SACS standards". Specific results for this deliverable are as follows:

Key Indicators for Exemplary Content	Raw Score (Yes Ratings)	Percentage
a. Learning outcomes exceptionally cover disciplinary knowledge reflective of the course description and title. (s)	70	50%
b. Various types of goals and outcomes are operationally defined and articulated in a way that graduate students can easily understand. (t)	44	31%
c. There is unusually clear and concise logic for the integration of learning outcomes through the course. (u)	43	30%
d. Learning objectives are measurable and quantifiable . (v)	42	30%
e. Learning objectives contain verbage that is both feasible and measurable indicating higher level learning according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (w)	43	30%

Scores in this criterion were marginal. Very few syllabi were considered exemplary in nature. There was a correlation between syllabi rated as exemplary and the accreditation status of a program. In other words, those syllabi that are part of an accredited program met all of the secondary key indicators in this criterion. Other syllabi rated exemplary were also connected to a joint program with another institution. Example exemplary syllabi are a) SOWK 710: Soc Work w/ Families I & Youth I, b) HDSV 706: Organization Management Guidance Service, c) MSA 774: Curriculum & Instruction Leadership, and d) FCS 612: Senior Seminar.

Identify Courses Fostering Independent Learning

The final goal of Project A was to *Identify Courses Fostering Independent Learning*. To assess this criterion, syllabi were rated as either "Does Not Foster Independent Learning" or "Fosters Independent Learning" thereby indicating the courses that exceeded SACS standards. Secondary key indicators were rated as either Yes (n=1) or No (n=0). A total of forty-five (n=45) syllabi were rated as "more advanced/meets SACS standards" and ninety-four (n=94) were rated as "less advanced/ does not meet SACS standards". Specific results for this deliverable are as follows:

Key Indicators of Fostering Independent Learning	Raw Score (Yes Ratings)	Percentage
a. Includes knowledge of the literature of the discipline (y)	92	66%
b. Ensures ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences (z)	89	64%
c. Includes opportunities for critical thinking and reflection (AA)	68	49%
d. Provides professional development opportunities (i.e. conferences) (AB)	46	33%

It should be noted that multiple parts of the syllabus were used to accurately assess this criteria. Course objectives, assignments, projects, group exercises, reflective exercises, field experiences, and guest lecturers were all reviewed to determine if a syllabus fostered independent learning.

Key Observations and Future Implications

Several key observations were made during this study. These observations include:

- Syllabi varied in content and length.
- Some syllabi within a department were more detailed than others.
- A correlation existed between accredited department programs and the depth of the syllabi.
- Adjunct faculty or non-tenured track faculty syllabi differed from others.
- Some syllabi used the terms course description and course objectives interchangeably. Numerous syllabi did not contain course objectives.
- Several syllabi used accreditation standards as the course objectives. At times, these standards were extremely nebulous.

Worthy of noting is that seven (n=7) syllabi were noted as missing all criteria and indicators. These syllabi received a "0" rating on the spreadsheet. Also, a total of nineteen syllabi did not contain course/learning objectives. These syllabi also received a "0" rating on the spreadsheet. The above ratings resulted in a variation of raw scores in each criterion.

There are several limitations to the current study. One primary limitation was the time in which the syllabi were required to be submitted. The syllabi were requested during the summer, a time in which most faculty are not teaching. This factor contributed to the small sample size. Secondly, a few of the documents submitted as syllabi were department spreadsheets listing the courses and not the syllabi.

Several recommendations are suggested that will enhance current courses, strengthen student outcomes, and promote consistency in syllabi across Colleges and Schools on the campus of North Carolina A&T State University. The recommendations are as follows:

- Develop a standardized format for all syllabi across campus using many of the key indicators employed during this study. In doing so, there should be space for faculty creativity and unique accreditation needs per syllabus.
- Host a workshop on syllabi development, especially with new and adjunct faculty. A useful and flexible format for such a workshop is in an on-line asynchronous environment.
- Create a clearinghouse of exemplary syllabi and hands-on activities for faculty use.

Overall, the syllabi reviewed contain a wealth of potential. The current investigator plans to continue the study by obtaining inter-rater reliability on each of the key indicators. Creating a uniform structure for all syllabi will not only assist in meeting accreditation standards, but it will also assist faculty in developing course objectives that yield achievable and measurable outcomes. As a result, we will see better outcomes in courses and student performance.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**School of Graduate Studies
North Carolina A & T State University
SACS 2010 Reaffirmation Subcommittee on Graduate Education
2008 Faculty Summer Project A**

Purpose of Faculty Project A:

The purpose of the SACS Graduate Education Project A is to solicit assistance from a faculty in the School of Education to focus on two specific tasks: 1) review graduate level course objectives for measurable evidence that the courses are progressively more advanced than the undergraduate program and, 2) document that the course provides an opportunity for independent learning.

Project Overview:

SACS principle 3.6.1 states: “the institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, master’s and doctoral degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs.” Principle 3.6.2 states: “the institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.”

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Project Deliverables:

1. Identify courses that currently meet the SACS standards and those that are not in compliance.
2. Identify course syllabi that are exemplary models of meeting SACS principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.

Project Time period:

May 13, 2008 – June 30, 2008

Compensation:

Assistant Professor - \$5,550

Associate Professor - \$6,075

Adjuncts - \$3,600

Contact: A. Ayanna Boyd-Williams, Assistant Dean, Graduate Studies
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120 Gibbs Hall

APPENDIX B

PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Course Syllabus Evaluation Rubric

- I) SACS principle 3.6.1 states: “the institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, master’s and doctoral degree programs are progressively **more advanced in academic content** than its undergraduate programs.”
- 1) Less Advanced=0
 - 2) More Advanced=1

Indicators for More Advanced Academic Content²

- a. Learning objectives cover disciplinary knowledge reflective of the course description and title.
 - b. Various types of goals and outcomes are listed and worded in a way that graduate students can easily understand.
 - c. There is clear logic for the integration of learning outcomes through the course.
 - d. Learning objectives are measurable.
 - e. Learning objectives contain verbage indicating higher level learning according to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (i.e. synthesize, explain, differentiate, judge)³
- II) Identify course syllabi that are **exemplary models** of meeting SACS principles 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.
- 1) Non Exemplary Model=0
 - 2) Exemplary Model=1

Indicators of Exemplary Models

- a. Learning outcomes **exceptionally** cover disciplinary knowledge reflective of the course description and title.
 - b. Various types of goals and outcomes are **operationally defined and articulated** in a way that graduate students can easily understand.
 - c. There is **unusually clear and concise** logic for the integration of learning outcomes through the course.
 - d. Learning objectives are measurable and **quantifiable**.
 - e. Learning objectives contain verbage that is both **feasible and measurable** indicating higher level learning according to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
- III) Principle 3.6.2 states: “the institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources **foster independent learning**, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.”
- 1) Does Not Foster Independent Learning=0
 - 2) Fosters Independent Learning=1

² Key indicators were developed using information from the following accreditation bodies: SACS, NCATE, and CORE.

³ The higher level verbage indicators were developed using Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.

Indicators of Fostering Independent Learning

- e. Includes knowledge of the literature of the discipline
- f. Ensures ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences
- g. Includes opportunities for critical thinking and reflection
- h. Provides professional development opportunities (i.e. conferences)

APPENDIX C
PROJECT DATA