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Institutional accreditation liaisons in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools region: characteristics, responsibilities, and force field analysis

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INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION LIAISONS
IN THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS REGION:
CHARACTERISTICS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The School of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development

by
Tracy W. Molitor
B.A., University of Texas at Arlington, 1996
M.A.Ed., University of Denver, 2000
August 2011

DEDICATION

To my amazing husband and best friend, Christian Molitor, for his never-wavering encouragement, support, and love—all of which were critical in this personal and professional achievement. I can't imagine how lonely you would have been over the last year and a half without Christopher, Emma, and Oscar, or how bored you would have been without all the yardwork, housework, cooking, shopping, laundry, and running errands for me! Thank you.

To my loving son, Christopher Wright, who spent many nights and weekends with his mother away at classes, completely immersed in reading, or too focused to turn her attention from her computer screen. I know you always worried about my work load and stress. In a way, I am hopeful this significant accomplishment is a meaningful example of how hard work and dedication combine to make us better in the long run.

Christian and Christopher, I'll spend the rest of my life thanking you and giving you the attention you have deserved all along. I love you both more than words could ever express; moreover, I know now, at the moment of this writing, you would be telling me to wrap it up and come home. And so I will.

To my parents, Diana and Martin Hudechek, without whose love and encouragement I never would have had the confidence or the audacity to think I could achieve a doctorate as a first generation college student, and without whose contagious work ethic I would not have internalized the physical or mental wherewithal to make this dream come true. Thank you for always encouraging me to be who I am.

To my other parents, Joan and Jerry Molitor, I have missed you and promise I will be a better wife to your son from here on out! Joan, thanks for pulling the all-nighter with me at my office. You always have been a real trooper (as raising seven really great sons proves).

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Above all, I acknowledge and humbly thank God for giving me the strength always to grow. I am blessed beyond comprehension. True development always involves challenge. One prayer, taped to my computer for nearly two years now, has given me perspective throughout what has been very difficult at times. This was passed on to me by a colleague who emphasizes that every decision we make is not critical nor is every mistake fatal: “Lord, help me keep things in perspective and avoid the panic such thinking creates. Amen.” Anyone who knows me will understand why it has been important to keep this appeal front and center. I have grown in faith as I have grown intellectually. Prayers of thanksgiving permeate my inner spirit—again, a wonderful blessing.

No one outside my family has provided more support, guidance, and true caring for my well-being throughout this challenging process than Krisanna Machtmes, my major professor and dissertation committee chair. I have been in higher education as a professional for 20 years now, and have spent nearly as many as a student! In all my experience, I never have encountered a faculty member more committed to her students’ success. I am certain my program would have taken at least one, possibly two, additional years without her intelligence, pragmatism, honesty, and encouragement at every step, 24/7. Additionally, her husband Rollin, who always accepted me into their home with a big smile and a hearty laugh, made this process much more pleasant for me and, I’m sure, more tolerable for his wife!

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anyone has in a long time. I aspire to one day be as intelligent, balanced, confident, and generous as Mary Leah.

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Staff members at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools were instrumental in validating the relevance of my dissertation topic and in communicating across the region the agency's support for my research. Thank you; undoubtedly, I owe my excellent response rate to your efforts. I hope my findings add value to accreditation processes moving forward.

Mea culpa to the rest of my family and friends, who missed me when I was unable to go to gatherings, remember important dates, place phone calls just to catch up, or return e-mail for weeks on end. I really did not fall off the face of the Earth! A special thanks to my extraordinary sister, Kristin Schardein; remarkable friend and confidant, Bente Clausen; best gal pal and sister-in-law, Becky Hudechek; and my smart and silly nieces, Sidney and Paige Hudechek, for

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Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops, at all.

Emily Dickinson

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' role of Accreditation Liaison to (a) explore the characteristics of the professionals who fill the Accreditation Liaison role and (b) understand factors that support or challenge liaisons. Within the theoretical framework of Kurt Lewin's Field Theory, a sequential mixed-methods research design was employed to collect data in two phases. The quantitative method in the first phase was an on-line survey. The instrument focused on respondents' educational, professional, and demographic characteristics, as well as their roles, responsibilities, and practices as Accreditation Liaisons. The second, qualitative, phase of the study relied on telephone interviews for data collection. Confidential interviews served to clarify survey responses, as needed, and to collect data regarding the factors that drive/support or block/challenge respondents in their roles as Accreditation Liaisons. Research findings are presented for both phases of the study, followed by meta-inferences, recommendations for future research, and considerations for higher education professionals whose work focuses on accreditation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The university or college campus has various constituent bodies (the institution as a whole and its directors, students, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni and general public), each with its own interests and concerns (Goonan & Blechman, 1999, p. 1).

. . . there are very real dangers in the profession of academic administration. Certain ones can be fatal professionally; others can be crippling for both the administrator and the institution (Budig & Rives, 1973, p. 8).

Nearly 40 years ago, Budig and Rives (1973) characterized the political landscape for higher education administrators as “quicksand,” noting the demands on university administrators are “often excessive and unrealistic” (p. 7). Compounding challenges inherent to academia, the political landscape becomes more sensitive over time. Today, a broad range of stakeholders increasingly question return on investment in higher education in America. Administrators in postsecondary institutions must meet and balance the sometimes conflicting needs of their constituencies.

Tuition and fees increase annually at nearly all colleges and universities, most often at percentages well over double the annual inflation rate. “Given their major investments in higher education, students, parents, and politicians want assurance that they are getting substantial educational returns in exchange for their time and money” (Klein, Liu, & Sconing, 2009, p. 6). Shavelson and Huang (2003) referred to the focus on assessment and accountability in postsecondary education as a “frenzy” for public policy mandates. It is essential that postsecondary institutions respond effectively to calls for accountability; however, doing so requires major organizational and systemic changes in many colleges and universities.

Accountability in higher education historically has fallen within the realm of accreditation processes. As will be espoused below, accreditation agencies and the federal government work together with leaders in higher education to define standards for colleges and

universities. Almost all colleges and universities are accredited by one of eight regional accrediting bodies in the United States (US). Attaining accreditation involves comprehensive internal and external review of all aspects of an institution's finances, facilities, policies, personnel, operations, and outcomes. Additionally, accreditation requires documentation of continuous improvement in all of these areas.

One might argue that accreditation is an internal process, mostly involving leaders in higher education, and the call for accountability, fundamentally, is a call to share more details of institutional review results with stakeholders outside the academy. In other words, while accreditation status has always been public information, constituencies increasingly have begun seeking additional information about what is being reviewed, what performance measures are being employed, and the outcomes of those performance measures.

At the same time institutions are receiving pressure to share these details, accreditation requirements and processes are becoming more rigorous. For example, all of the regional accrediting agencies have augmented their major decennial review time lines with new interim review and reporting requirements every five to seven years.

Higher education leaders in public and private sectors, governmental and non-governmental organizations, call for the academy to meet the information needs of the community proactively, in a way that meets the needs of the academy and the community, before such disclosure is mandated. Therefore, one might also conclude there is a frenzy inside higher education to preempt, effectively, public policy mandates.

Developing a strong culture of assessment, documentation, reporting, and transparency must be the basis for meeting the goals of all higher education stakeholders. Simply stated, institutions and their representative organizations have no choice but to respond to public

demand. Doing so requires a great deal of deliberate action: strategic planning, savvy management, and continuous evaluation of all areas within the educational enterprise. Higher education traditionally has not been conceptualized as a business, yet it is big business, and stakeholders are demanding to understand return on their investments.

In order to meet these needs, colleges and universities nationwide are restructuring their programming and operations, putting business models and systems in place for managing resources, and hiring professionals who understand business as well as higher education. The academy must assess itself. This author proposes it might be prudent to assess certain aspects of the accreditation process in tandem.

Purpose Statement

This study's primary purpose of this study was to provide the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges (COC), or SACSCOC, as well as other regional accrediting agencies and postsecondary institutional executives, with information that may be useful in supporting continuous improvement of accreditation practices. The research focused on certain aspects of accountability as it relates to accreditation in higher education. Specifically, the role of the Accreditation Liaison (AL) within the SACSCOC region was evaluated.

This study proposed to describe the characteristics of the individuals serving in this role, as well as factors they perceived either supported or inhibited their ability to perform their responsibilities. SACSCOC defined the responsibilities of the liaison, provided recommendations for college and university presidents in choosing a liaison, and outlined suggestions for liaisons' professional development (see Appendix 1).

Research Questions

As mentioned above, this study sought to explore the role of the SACSCOC AL to (a) explore the characteristics of the professionals who fill the AL role, and (b) understand factors that support or challenge liaisons. The overarching purpose of this study was to increase knowledge about and support for ALs.

Objectives

The objectives for this research study are as follows:

1. To describe SACSCOC ALs on selected demographic, institutional, and professional characteristics;
2. To understand whether a majority of SACSCOC ALs sought the role originally and continue their aspiration to serve in the role;
3. To identify trends in role-critical institutional areas in which liaisons have responsibility but do not have decision-making authority;
4. To describe SACSCOC ALs on selected educational and professional development experiences and needs;
5. To explore the level of challenge SACSCOC ALs experience carrying out SACS-specified AL responsibilities;
6. To determine the extent to which liaisons have followed SACSCOC's recommendations in preparing to meet AL responsibilities; and
7. To examine forces that support or hinder incumbent SACSCOC ALs.

Limitations

Within this research study, there will be some limitations to address:

- This population experiences relatively high turnover; therefore, some of the liaisons in the sample may not have much experience in the role and may not have led any significant SACSCOC processes, such as reaffirmation or substantive change.
- The research is being conducted with ALs from one of the eight regional accrediting agencies.
- The interviews will be via phone, so may not render results as rich as would face-to-face interviews (Gwartney, 2007).
- Individual institutions within a defined system are included in the sample. The study does not differentiate between single-campus institutions and those with multiple (satellite) campuses. Liaisons responsible for accreditation processes across a range of locations may have different experiences than those responsible for single-campus reporting.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply. Unless otherwise cited, all terms are researcher-defined.

- Accreditation – official authorization, approval, or recognition of (a) credentials, (b) conforming with standards, (c) maintaining standards that qualify graduates for additional education or professions (Merriam-Webster, 2011).
- Accreditation Liaison (AL) – an individual appointed by the chief executive officer of a college or university to serve as a contact and coordinator for all SACS-related matters.

- Field – “a totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent” (Lewin, 1951, p. 338).
- Field Theory – is not defined by Lewin, although he described it as “best characterized as a method of analyzing causal relations and of building scientific constructs” (Lewin, 1951, p. 201).
- Institution Type – governance classification of institutions of higher education. Institutions may be public, or private, with the latter further identified as for-profit or not-for-profit.
- Level III Institution – approved to offer master’s degrees and lower.
- Level IV Institution – approved to offer educational specialist degrees and lower.
- Level V Institution – approved to offer (3 or fewer) doctoral degrees and lower.
- Level VI Institution – approved to offer (4 or more) doctoral degrees and lower.
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges (COC) / or SACSCOC – Regional educational accrediting agency. A representative body of the College Delegate Assembly responsible for higher education accreditation in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools region.
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Region – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin American institutions offering associate, baccalaureate, and/or master’s degrees.

Theoretical Framework

Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is one of the masters of social psychology (Back, 1986; Cook, 1986; Lippitt, 1986; Schellenberg, 1978) and is internationally known for the significant impact

his work has had on serving as a foundation for research in the social sciences (Cook, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Schellenberg, 1978; Stivers & Wheelan, 1986). Lewin differed from other notable psychologists of his time in that he did not accept that behaviors were completely reliant on individual characteristics but rather dependent upon the total psychological field of the individual. As a leader in this way of thinking, Lewin asserted “what is needed is to get behind the appearances of behaving individuals to the truly determining forces of their behavior” (Schellenberg, 1978, p. 68).

Although Lewin never clearly defined “field theory” (Allport, 1948), he conceived the model and described it in terms of many different concepts presented in a series of scholarly papers throughout his career (Lewin, 1936; Lewin, 1948; Schellenberg, 1978). In the foreword to the first compilation of Lewin’s papers, Allport (1948) described the set of concepts as anchored in dynamic psychology of tension systems within an individual and involving pressures from his or her environment – field forces – that drive one’s motivations and actions.

In Lewin’s field theory, an individual’s actions always are the result of individual and environmental factors interacting together (Lewin, 1936; 1938; 1948; 1951). Some factors, or forces, in the environment will have a positive driving force on one’s actions, while other factors will be perceived by the individual to be negative and, therefore, act as blocking forces.

Schellenberg (1978) pointed out Lewin’s psychological approach was distinct in the early 20th century in that his work was directed to practical application, and he was interested particularly in human motivation as it related to human perception. Positive or negative forces in one’s environment interact with the individual’s characteristics and space in time to create a continuum of sorts, in which the individual experiences various levels of momentum toward or away from action, or goal attainment.

Psychological regions of the environment can show very different dynamical properties. They can offer either great or slight resistance to locomotion; they can attract, can be neutral, or can repulse; they can represent living beings or objects; they can exhibit any degree of fluidity or elasticity; they can react differently to different influences. (Lewin, 1936, p. 115)

Field theory fits well with structural concepts in organizations and helps individuals understand dynamic concepts such as motivation, frustration, goal setting and attainment, and leadership efficacy. Pepitone (1986) stated “. . . for example, the position of the individual with respect to goals, being in overlapping situations at the same time, membership in a group, location in a status hierarchy, and being surrounded by a barrier (p. xv).” The concept of field theory as it relates to organizational structures has a direct impact on an individual’s needs and abilities to perform (Pepitone, 1986). Removing or reducing the power of blocking forces may be the most effective way to foster change (Morgan, 1989).

Lewin did much to shed light on group dynamics and comparative theory. As change occurs, such as members of a group changing, so does the field (Back, 1986). In the context of this study, Lewin’s field theory adds richness when considering the contemporary milieu of higher education in terms of change and those responsible for change management in colleges and universities. Lewin posited that any structure or object is different at different points in time and/or in different places (Back, 1986; Lewin, 1936).

An important tenet of field theory is the requirement for and significance of the individual to be understood as part of the field. This point of clarification is present in many of Lewin’s papers, but is explained especially well in *Defining the Field at a Given Time*, which he wrote in 1943. The psychological field of an individual includes his or her characteristics, experiences, expectations, and perceptions (Lewin, 1951). These aspects of field theory support the collection of some of these data from research subjects in the current study.

It would be remiss to not point out that the research methods approach of this study also fits very well within Lewin's theoretical perspective of social science inquiry. He used as a premise for most of his work concepts involving topology, an area of geometry that "treats special relationships without regard to quantitative measurement" (Lewin, 1948, p. ix). While mixed-methods research has gained momentum over the last 25 years (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009), Lewin respected and relied upon the mixed-methods paradigms of German scholars 100 years ago, referring to controversies between qualitative and quantitative approaches, and concluding "quantitative and qualitative approaches are not opposites but necessary complements of each other" (Lewin, 1951, p. 191). "One of the unique properties of field theory as far as empirical implications are concerned is that it represents the case in which structural conditions influence dynamics, as well as the reverse case in which dynamics affect structure" (Pepitone, 1986, p. xvi).

Finally, as an assessment professional myself, I also find it extremely fitting that Lewin stressed the importance of self-study as an important activity in change and social action. Allport (1948) characterized this line of thought as bold for the times, such that remedial efforts are best studied and undertaken within groups:

The process of retraining attitudes, [Lewin] knew, requires that participating groups be led to examine their goals and their presuppositions, that members be led to take the roles of other people . . . that they learn to become detached and objective in examining the foundations of their own biases. (p. xiii)

Significance of the Study

Accredited colleges and universities must undergo an extensive and comprehensive review process at least every 10 years to have their accreditation status reaffirmed. The review process includes 87 (including subsections) core requirements, comprehensive standards, and

federal requirements that must be addressed and documented in detail. (Hereafter, these requirements and standards will be referred to collectively as “principles.”)

After an institution completes a self-study and submits to SACSCOC their compliance report and supporting documentation, SACSCOC proceeds with a three-stage process: (a) an off-site committee of trained peer evaluators does an off-site review of all of the institution’s materials, (b) a different committee of peer evaluators conducts an on-site evaluation of the institution, and (c) a SACSCOC Compliance and Reports (C&R) Committee reviews the evaluation reports from the off-site and on-site committees for each institution. Following the off-site and on-site committee reviews, the institution receives a report from the COC and has an opportunity to address negative findings before the next review phase. The last step of the review process occurs with the C&R Committee. Institutions not successful in meeting all expectations of the C&R Committee will be put on monitoring status and have up to two years to come into full accreditation compliance before more formal sanctions are applied.

SACSCOC maintains and distributes annual statistics regarding the results of each of the three phases of the review process (see Appendix 2). In 2010, 44 Level III-VI institutions sought reaffirmation. Off-site review committees reported over 25% noncompliance for 34 of the principles. Those institutions had an opportunity to address the shortcomings before the on-site committee review; however, 14 principles still resulted in 10% or higher noncompliance following on-site reviews. Between the on-site review and C&R review, institutions submitted additional narratives and justifications for compliance. Fifteen principles were found to have 5% or higher noncompliance at this final review stage, resulting in institutional monitoring, additional reporting, and reviews for up to two years.

These data clearly indicate noncompliance with accreditation standards, despite enormous allocation of resources to accreditation efforts. The Council of Higher Education Accreditation, Institute for Research and Study of Accreditation and Quality Assurance, reported on the condition of accreditation in 2007 (2008), including data specific to regional accrediting agencies as follows:

- 3,025 colleges and universities were accredited by regional accrediting agencies;
- 18,469,893 students were enrolled in these institutions;
- 2006-2007 national operating budgets totaled \$21,523,636;
- 19,720 professional volunteers made themselves available to support regional accreditation efforts; and
- financial support for volunteers (expenses only, no remuneration) exceeded \$5.5 million.

Institutional accreditation is critical in substantiating compliance with federal requirements and widely accepted academic standards. The data above represent commitment to the process of accreditation, which is firmly grounded in a paradigm of quality assurance and continuous quality improvement.

The Commission requires institutions to provide compliance certification documentation as part of decennial reaffirmation as indicated below.

The Compliance Certification, submitted approximately fifteen months in advance of an institution's scheduled reaffirmation, is a document completed by the institution that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements. Signatures by the institution's chief executive officer and accreditation liaison are required to certify compliance. By signing the document, the individuals certify that the process of institutional self assessment has been thorough, honest, and forthright, and that the information contained in the document is truthful, accurate, and complete. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Atlanta, 2010, p. 6)

During personal experiences as a SACS liaison over the last three years, and through many conversations with my counterparts at other institutions, it is apparent challenges exist. Based only on anecdotal evidence, I understand there is a high rate of turnover and many in the role do not have the authority necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. Liaisons are appointed by a college president or chancellor, or chief executive officer (CEO). While responsibility for ensuring compliance is shared by all administrators, faculty, and staff within a college or university, the CEO and AL exclusively must sign all SACS documents as the responsible parties. Their signatures affirm everything in the report is accurate and has been prepared with integrity (see Appendix 3).

Essentially, this means the liaison, in addition to the CEO, has responsibility for accurately representing every area of the institution. Academic and administrative leaders expect the liaison to be an expert in all accreditation policies and procedures and to guide them in preparation of all reports and documentation. Of course, there are times when the liaison must communicate (a) additional work needs to be done; (b) reports are not sufficient; and/or (c) documentation is insufficient, inaccurate, or irrelevant. The liaison also must ensure institutional priorities and time lines are followed. As Brumbaugh (1956) pointed out, “the authority vested in an administrative officer should be commensurate with the responsibility delegated to him” (p. 4). Most often, the SACS liaison reports to the president but has no authority over other members of the senior leadership team.

There are good reasons for this arrangement, in terms of ensuring a system of checks and balances. At the same time, as the responsible party, the SACS AL will have to do the work if those with direct responsibility do not. The liaison role is not a coordination role. The exploration of the liaison role was of particular interest to the researcher to learn about the profile

of a SACS liaison, such as education, professional experience, job title, reporting structure, length of time in the position, faculty or administrator status, and ongoing professional development activities. Qualitative data about factors that support or challenge effectiveness in the position was collected through phone interviews.

The research supported the COC, as well as college and university CEOs, by providing empirical research results that may be used in reconsidering the characteristics, roles, responsibilities, and professional development for ALs. The COC may choose to update their AL policy statement. Colleges and universities may choose to create or strengthen internal policies and procedures related to the AL. Institutions may benefit by recruiting and hiring better prepared individuals, placing them differently within the organizational structure, providing them with more targeted training, and involving and training more faculty to serve as partners in accreditation and accountability efforts.

Ideally, the findings of this study will prove to be valuable to all regional accrediting agencies and any institutional administrator struggling to develop and implement an effective structure for accreditation. At a minimum, hopefully the results of this study will be the impetus for a formal network of liaisons to support each other and share best practices across the region.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature pertaining to the aforementioned research study. A search to find relevant information pertaining to ALs began with identification of terms within the chosen topic. Searches were conducted through the use of EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Pertinent information was also obtained through textbooks, scholarly books, governmental documents, accrediting agency policies and procedures, and publications of national higher education organizations.

Accreditation may be understood as an ongoing process for ensuring quality and continuous improvement in all areas of educational operations and academic programming. In higher education, accreditation is a private enterprise, rather than a federal requirement, and often is referred to as a voluntary system of accountability to demonstrate institutional quality. Colleges and universities are not required to be accredited; yet, most choose to participate in the process.

Brief History of Accreditation in American Higher Education

Efforts to define standards in American higher education began in the 18th century as a way to protect the health and well-being of society. Alstete (2007) found conflicting information in several of the most comprehensive historical accounts of accreditation. In the 19th century, college presidents and state governments began considering common standards, especially related to specialized programs like medicine. Rudolph (1962) pointed out that the first meeting for leaders from different states to discuss accreditation in broad terms was not until 1906.

The search for common standards was epitomized in 1908 with the establishment and broad acceptance of the Carnegie credit hour as a defined unit of instruction (Rudolph, 1962).

Geiger (1999) noted that by 1914 standards had been established and were widely used across institution types for credit hours, and also for admissions, program lengths, and majors.

Also during the first quarter of the 20th century, regional accrediting agencies were formed. One of the primary reasons for their development had to do with students' transitions from high schools to college—ensuring appropriate preparation and articulation. By 1925, major progress was made in developing standards for postsecondary education, resources, facilities, and operations. The initial standards were quite prescriptive. Over the next 25 years, colleges and universities increased significantly in number, as well as in the number of students they served. Standards were not relaxed, but changes were made to permit institutions to interpret standards and demonstrate compliance within a mission-specific scope.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, many of the same trends continued, but the federal government became more involved as a result of the GI Bill and increased federal aid. The United States Department of Education (USDE) was investing a great deal of taxpayer dollars in education and began questioning outcomes, or return on investment.

The next 25 years saw two accreditation coordination boards run by the federal government: the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) and the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA). In an environment of increased focus on educational standards and academic quality assurance, there was much national debate about the federal government's role in higher education (Alstete, 2007). COPA and CORPA were phased out over the last quarter of the 20th century. American college presidents collaborated and drove the process to begin the Commission for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which encompassed the ultimate goals of all stakeholders.

At the beginning of the 21st century, higher education continues to be the focus of political and academic debates. Learning is the most obvious purpose of postsecondary education, but education is big business. Consider there are nearly 5,000 public, private, and specialized institutions serving nearly 18 million students. As in most other industries, businesses, and services, institutions of higher education are not exempt from the call to explain what the consumer (student) gets for her/his money (tuition and fees). In addition to providing graduates with credentials, colleges and universities need to demonstrate they have a positive impact on learning. Investment of tax dollars also promotes a reasonable expectation that higher education outcomes, ultimately, will promote economic development. Some refer to this call as accountability, while others consider it the practice of assessment (Benjamin & Klein, 2006; Chun, 2002; Lubinescu, Radcliff, & Gaffney, 2001; Shavelson, 2007).

Teachers and administrators have always had various methods to determine whether students were performing well. Grades on assignments and in courses were the most common practice of measuring student performance; however, this was, and still is, an unscientific and often unreliable method of assessing student learning. The movement toward formalized assessment began in the 1980s when several national committees called for broad and significant change in higher education. Their goal was to promote excellence in undergraduate education by supporting institutions as they sought methods for planning specific learning outcomes and measuring student achievement.

In 1985, the federal government, under Education Secretary William Bennett, made a bold and public statement directed to the American Council on Education. Bennett indicated the need for colleges and universities to state their goals, measure students' success in reaching those goals, and make the results of those measurements public; further, Bennett stated, if the

institutions did not do it themselves, governments or commercial businesses would most likely be called upon to do it for them (Nichols, 1991).

Two years later, the United States' federal policy changed as it related to criteria for recognition of accrediting agencies. The new requirements focused on accrediting agencies' assurance that institutions attained and maintained educational effectiveness at institutional and program levels. Nichols (1991) specified that as a result of this change, accrediting agencies were required for the first time to confirm institutions and their programs were able to (and did) measure student achievement by: (a) making public their expected learning outcomes, as consistent with their institutional mission; (b) verifying every student had successfully met all requirements of the academic program prior to graduating; (c) ensuring institutions accurately and systematically documented student achievement through consistent and widely accepted measurement methods; and (d) ensuring institutions used the student achievement data collected to create action plans to improve student learning in the future.

The Structure of the Accreditation Process

There are generally three major levels of approval involved in the course of action for an institution to be accredited and eligible for federal aid. A public or private degree-granting college or university first seeks accreditation from an approved accrediting agency. That agency seeks recognition from a nationwide coordinating association. Finally, the coordinating association reports to the federal government. There are many specialized accrediting agencies for faith-based, career training, or specialized academic programs, such as law, medicine, education, health professions, and technology. This research focused on the largest, most inclusive accreditation coordination board and the eight regional accrediting agencies that represent nearly all postsecondary institutions in the US.

The USDE and CHEA work together to ensure accreditation adds value to societal and economic goals. As a federal organization, the USDE is subject to federal regulations and laws. CHEA is a private, non-profit, national organization. There is no chain of command relationship between the two. CHEA, however, is required to provide regular detailed reports to the USDE.

USDE and CHEA both make decisions about whether to formally “recognize” accrediting agencies. “Recognition means that the accrediting organizations undergo a review of their qualifications and activities to determine whether they meet the standards of USDE or CHEA. If accreditors meet the standards, they are recognized” (CHEA, 2002, p. 3). Standards for recognition as an accrediting agency focus on their policies and procedures to ensure the schools they accredit meet requirements around educational quality, enrollment standards and student academic progress, facilities and learning resources, and fiscal and operational management. Accrediting agencies must go through a rigorous application process, as well as comprehensive regular reviews to be recognized by USDE or CHEA.

These two national organizations have the same ultimate goal with regard to educational quality and improvement, but they operate with different purposes. USDE is charged with managing federal financial aid. The organization sets minimum standards for colleges and universities in the areas of recruitment and admissions, administrative and financial capacity, facilities, and student achievement. Institutions not accredited by a USDE-recognized accrediting agency as having met minimum standards are not eligible to receive federal financial aid for their students; further, students attending non-accredited institutions are not eligible to apply for any federal aid or loans. Since USDE recognition has major fiscal impact—make-or-break impact—most institutional governing boards do not consider the federal designation optional.

CHEA's standards also involve fiscal management and financial aid administration in terms of sound policies and practices, but the organization's overarching focus is on ensuring continuous improvement of educational programs and academic achievement. CHEA has a more comprehensive group of standards, and the requirements for demonstrating compliance are more specific. CHEA recognizes accrediting agencies, not postsecondary institutions, and has extensive self-study and reporting requirements for these agencies.

There are eight major regional accrediting bodies in the United States:

- 1) Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Middle States Commission on Higher Education;
- 2) New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education;
- 3) New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission of Technical and Career Colleges;
- 4) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, The Higher Learning Commission;
- 5) Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities;
- 6) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges;
- 7) Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges; and
- 8) Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities.

Note, oftentimes people refer to the “six” regional accrediting agencies; when they do this, they are combining the two commissions in the New England Association (numbers two and three above) and the two commissions in the Western Association (numbers seven and eight above).

By requiring agencies to be recognized by USDE, legitimacy is added to the system. The president of CHEA noted the recognition processes of USDE and CHEA are similar: “Self-evaluation based on standards, site visit and report, award of recognition status. Recognition adds value to society as a vital part of accreditation accountability or ‘accrediting the accreditors’” (Eaton, 2009, p. 9).

The Value of Accreditation for Universities

The whole system of accreditation has as its foundation traditional academic values and beliefs. The specific language used by CHEA to describe these fundamental principles is, in this author’s opinion, reflective of the organization’s understanding of the core values of American higher education. CHEA’s statements are as follows:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for academic quality; colleges and universities are the leaders and the key sources of authority in academic matters.
- Institutional mission is central to judgments of academic quality.
- Institutional autonomy is essential to sustaining and enhancing academic quality.
- Academic freedom flourishes in an environment of academic leadership of institutions.
- The higher education enterprise and our society thrive on decentralization and diversity of institutional purpose and mission. (Eaton, 2009, p. 3).

Institutional accreditation is voluntary; however, there are several factors associated with accreditation that add value. The primary purpose of accreditation, regardless of which accrediting agency is approving the designation for institutions, is to ensure quality and continuous improvement in higher education. More specifically, according to the president of CHEA (Eaton, 2009) accreditation serves four roles: (1) providing formal recognition of

institutional quality for faculty, curricula, student affairs, libraries, and fiscal stability; (2) providing the government with information to support allocation of nearly \$100 billion annually in federal financial aid; (3) promoting confidence in educational quality when students are considering institutions, employers are considering an applicant's educational credentials; and (4) supporting further employee education, or donors are contemplating giving. Also, most often, transferring academic credits from one school to another requires the credits to have been earned from an accredited institution. These reasons all support student recruitment and admission and, therefore, the bottom line.

The steps involved at the institution level and the accrediting agency level are designed in such a way that academic leaders are required to participate in a meaningful way. This participation necessitates a great deal of time, effort, and investment. Initial application for and ongoing reaffirmations of accreditation are based on extensive and comprehensive self-studies. After the initial accreditation process is complete, full reviews are conducted for institutions in the SACSCOC region every 10 years.

The self-study is submitted to the accrediting agency and then reviewed in detail by two different committees (off-site review and on-site review) of qualified, trained, and unpaid volunteers from other similar institutions. This peer review process adds a component of trust to the process. The last step of the process involves the accrediting agency reviewing all reports and making a decision that the institution meets all compliance standards and requirements.

If all are met, the institution will not report back to SACSCOC until a Fifth-Year Interim Report is due or there is a substantive change to the institution's governance, mission, programming, or location. If all standards and requirements are not met during the decennial process, the accrediting agency will put an institution on "monitoring" status, whereby the

college or university must follow a published process and time line for becoming compliant with all standards and requirements.

In summary, institutional accreditation is critical in substantiating compliance with federal requirements and widely accepted academic standards. The system of higher education accreditation in the United States operates with an enormous amount of involvement and sincere personal and professional investment from academic and administrative leaders alike.

“Sometimes a convergence of external forces such as . . . accreditation standards and an authentic desire to improve student learning move schools to assess systematically aspects of the student experience and institutional performance” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005, p. 21).

Possibilities for Future Accreditation Policies and Practices

Colleges and universities are supported to varying degrees by public funds; consequently, taxpayers and legislators, in addition to students and their families, are entitled to some understanding of their return on investment, especially in times of economic recession. “The question is not one of whether to hold higher education accountable but one of what campuses should be held accountable for and how they should be held accountable” (Shavelson, 2010, p. 133).

There is a common misunderstanding about the difference between accountability and assessment and the fact that the two are not mutually exclusive (Benjamin & Klein, 2006; Klein, Benjamin, Shavelson, & Bolus, 2007). Accountability generally connotes external imposition to provide justification and/or support performance. In contrast, assessment in higher education ideally is based on the premise of continuous improvement. Accreditation is one way of bringing accountability and assessment together. CHEA’s mission statement makes this point:

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation will serve students and their families, colleges and universities, sponsoring bodies, governments, and employers by promoting academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and will coordinate and work to advance self-regulation through accreditation. (Eaton, 2009, p. i)

Marchese (1987) pointed out that external validation of assessment practices, outcomes, and subsequent actions is usually essential; still “assessment per se guarantees nothing by way of improvement, no more than a thermometer cures a fever” (p. 8). It is very important for assessment to focus on improving student learning first and then on documenting institutional effectiveness for external agencies or stakeholders.

Bok (2006) asserted the future of accreditation, most especially as it includes and relates to student learning, must continue to rely on the expertise of faculty. He stated any type of performance funding or government-mandated learning outcomes will go against the fundamental tenets of higher education, including diversity among institutional missions and academic freedom:

Most faculties will be reluctant to cooperate actively with such a program. In fact, they may well resist for fear that the results will be used (and misused) to distort their teaching by bringing penalties and adverse publicity to institutions that fail to satisfy an inappropriate set of standards (Bok, 2006, p. 331)

Bok (2006) suggested a better approach for answering quality assurance questions would be for accrediting agencies and governments to confirm institutions are assessing their performance and using assessment results for continuous improvement.

For nearly 30 years, the debate about assessing student learning and making assessment results transparent has been an increasing presence in higher education literature and propaganda, public policy, and economics. The 2006 report of the Spellings Commission on Higher Education perhaps has been the most publicized federal document calling for change in American higher education. The report focused on action in three areas: (a) student learning, (b)

educational innovation, and (c) transparency and accountability. As Shavelson (2010) noted, the most formidable challenge may be to demonstrate, to everyone's satisfaction, student learning outcomes. There are thousands of books and scholarly articles on the topic. Sometimes the faculty in a single program at one institution cannot reach consensus about what the learning outcomes for their students should be, let alone how to demonstrate attainment of those outcomes. As the imperative to implement significant change in higher education resounds ever louder, faculty and administrators make slow but certain progress toward bridging the real and imagined gaps between accountability and assessment.

College administrators and faculty across the nation are working to articulate measurable learning outcomes; moreover, they seek ways to assess those outcomes, make institutional comparisons, and continuously improve their ability to support student learning. Many professionals in higher education are concerned that if the academy and the private system of accreditation do not make major changes with regard to measuring and making learning outcomes public, the federal government will take steps to do these things (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Driscoll & Cordero de Noriega, 2006; Ruben, 2010). Individuals at national conferences can be heard discussing their fears regarding legislation similar to "No Child Left Behind" being imposed on postsecondary education. For now, the providence of Secretary Bennett's long-ago prediction remains within the hands of the academy.

Accreditation Liaisons

There are 804 colleges and universities in the SACSCOC region. Each has an AL appointed by the CEO. The SACSCOC recommended the reporting structure for ALs, as well as ideal professional characteristics, liaison responsibilities, and opportunities for professional preparation of liaisons. SACSCOC's official Accreditation Liaison policy statement may be

found in Appendix 1. An AL should be an employee of, rather than a consultant to, an institution and should report directly to the CEO. Responsibilities of the AL role are as follows:

1. Ensuring SACS compliance is integrated into all phases of institutional planning and evaluation;
2. Communicating with SACS about major (substantive) institutional changes, according to predetermined time lines and policies;
3. Training institutional administrators, faculty, and staff on all SACS policies and reporting requirements;
4. Maintaining effective communication between the institution and COC staff;
5. Managing completion and submission of annual institutional profiles and other reports as requested by the COC;
6. Coordinating institutional review processes, including reporting and site visits;
7. Ensuring all institutional reports (electronic and paper, data and narrative) submitted to the Commission are accurate and timely; and
8. Keeping documentation of all institutional materials and correspondence related to regional accreditation with SACS.

The COC recommended several methods through which ALs may become best prepared for success in their roles. AL effectiveness is based on a foundation of effective communication with COC staff and involves: utilizing the resources on the agency's website; maintaining contact with the COC staff member assigned to the AL's college or university; participating in meetings of the Commission; serving as a peer evaluator for other institutions progressing through reaffirmation or other major review processes; studying the accreditation history of the

AL's institution; and maintaining organized documentation related to institutional accreditation correspondence.

Identification of Problem/Literature Review

The struggles of college and university administrators are well documented (Alstete, 2007; Bess & Dee, 1988; Brumbaugh, 1956; Goonan & Blechman, 1999; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Ruben, 2010). Professionalization of higher education administration began as early as the 1920s, with institutes at the University of Chicago. The first degree program for higher education administrators was initiated at the University of Michigan in 1950. Professional development and professional education for college and university administrators had major support and funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Blackwell (1966) stressed the continued importance of professional training for college administrators.

The environment in which American institutions of higher education operate has changed significantly over the last century. Currently, graduate degree programs in the academic discipline of higher education may be found at many colleges and universities across the country. A high percentage of these programs offer administration as an area of specialized study. However, none have been located that offer a curriculum that encompasses the full scope of the responsibilities of an institutional AL.

Several of the regional accrediting agencies in the US either require or recommend that institutions have a senior faculty member or administrator who serves as the AL to ensure all accreditation requirements are met. Although a structural position of leadership and visibility certainly is necessary to influence others in the organization, the position alone does not address

the critical question of whether the individual has the knowledge and skills to successfully meet his or her responsibilities as an AL.

Literature related to the AL role in higher education was not located. Further, inquiries to four vice presidents at SACS rendered no information as to the reason the role was developed and eventually became the basis for an organizational policy statement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Assessment and continuous improvement in American higher education always have served as broad lenses through which I have approached my graduate studies. In narrowing this research topic, I looked to the literature and also engaged my professional colleagues in discussions about potential dissertation topics. Some of these individuals were members of institutional accreditation review committees on which I served, others were SACS staff members, and still others were my counterparts at other institutions. Upon consideration of many factors, I became highly invested in studying ALs. The role, responsibilities, challenges, opportunities, and range of professionals filling this important position fascinate me.

Research Design

This study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to most appropriately address the objectives of the study. When used in purposeful combination, qualitative and quantitative research methods complement one another and result in a more complete analysis than what is possible in a single approach.

Additionally, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), the mixed-methods design is superior to single approach designs in three ways: (a) addressing a range of questions with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, (b) providing stronger inferences, and (c) integrating various respondent viewpoints. In a mixed-methods study, researchers approach their questions in the most appropriate way, regardless of whether the data collected are statistical or thematic, numeric or narrative. Research tools, variables, and units of analysis are chosen based on what works best for finding answers to the research questions and objectives (Creswell, 2002; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The steps set forth by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) were followed to determine whether a monomethod or mixed-method design was best suited to the research objective, and then an appropriate design was developed. In this study, a mixed-method design is most appropriate because qualitative data will provide a deeper understanding of quantitative findings. Priority, implementation order, and integration also were important factors in the research design.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the dual focal point of this study. The research questions are situated between the two triangles, indicating they are the focus of all efforts. The top triangle indicates the outset of the project and includes the broad research objectives. These objectives will be addressed in detail moving toward answering the research questions. The bottom triangle represents the data collection and analysis, which also will begin at a broader level and become more specific. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated, “The research question serves as a dual focal point that liaises between what was known about the topic before the study and what is learned about the topic during the study. Everything flows through and from the research questions” (p. 129). Statistical and narrative data analyses are equally important in addressing the objectives of this study, so neither the quantitative nor the qualitative phase is a priority at the outset. This potentially changes over the duration of any research such that the overall focus of the research may become more deductive (quantitative) or inductive (qualitative) (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Implementation order, however, does make a difference in this study. The characteristics of ALs must be understood as a foundation for exploring the perceptions of driving and blocking forces experienced by these individuals as they carry out their responsibilities; therefore, the quantitative data collection was first. Results from phase one were used to shape phase two.

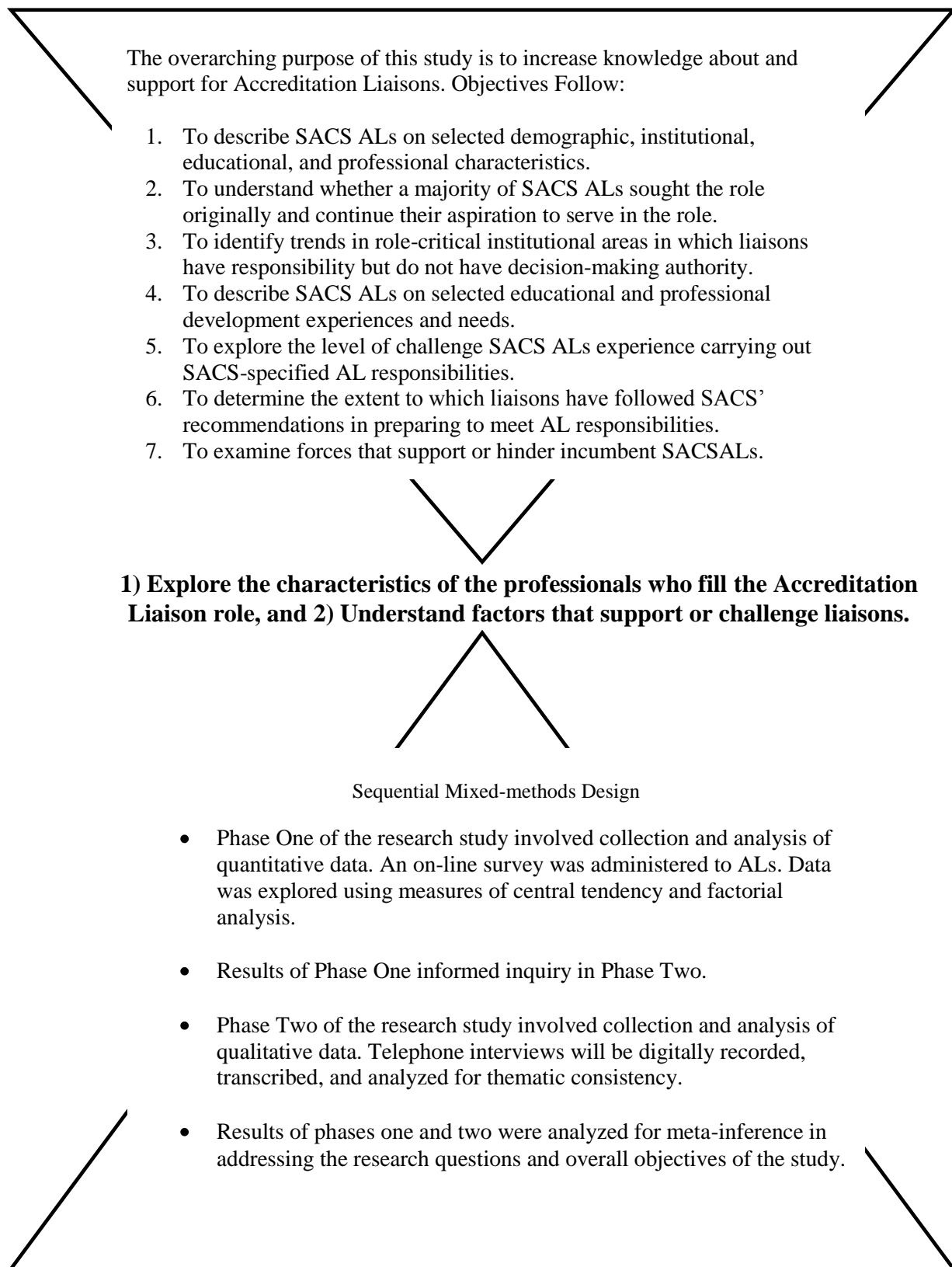


Figure 3.1: Dual Focal Point in the Research Process (Adapted from Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)

Greene and Caracelli's (1997) typology of mixed-methods provided a solid framework for the research integration plan. The initial design fit with their component classification of mixed-methods designs in that the data collection methods are distinct. Triangulation and complementarity methods were used in phase one to confirm the data and further explore data in phase two. I expected the distinct findings that resulted from each phase of the study, a design characteristic Greene and Caracelli (1997) referred to as expansion.

The phases of this research occurred in chronological order, with quantitative data collected in the first phase and qualitative data collected in the second phase. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) referred to this as a sequential design. Figure 3.2 presents a graphic model of this research design, with the boxes on the left indicating the first phase and the ovals on the right indicating the second phase. This research design is appropriate for exploratory studies (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), as the data analysis from the first phase is used to refine the data collection for the second phase. Following the second phase, data collected through that process were analyzed, and then all quantitative and qualitative data were considered in terms of their similarities, differences, and overall implications with regard to the research objectives.

The survey instrument was designed to gather numerical data to describe and determine existing variances in the ALs' demographic, educational, professional, and institutional characteristics. The quantitative data were analyzed to refine and explain a general understanding of respondents.

The second phase involved telephone interviews to collect qualitative data as a way to address questions that emerged from the first phase and also to obtain a rich personal context within which to interpret the quantitative results. "Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a

reader—another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers”
(Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

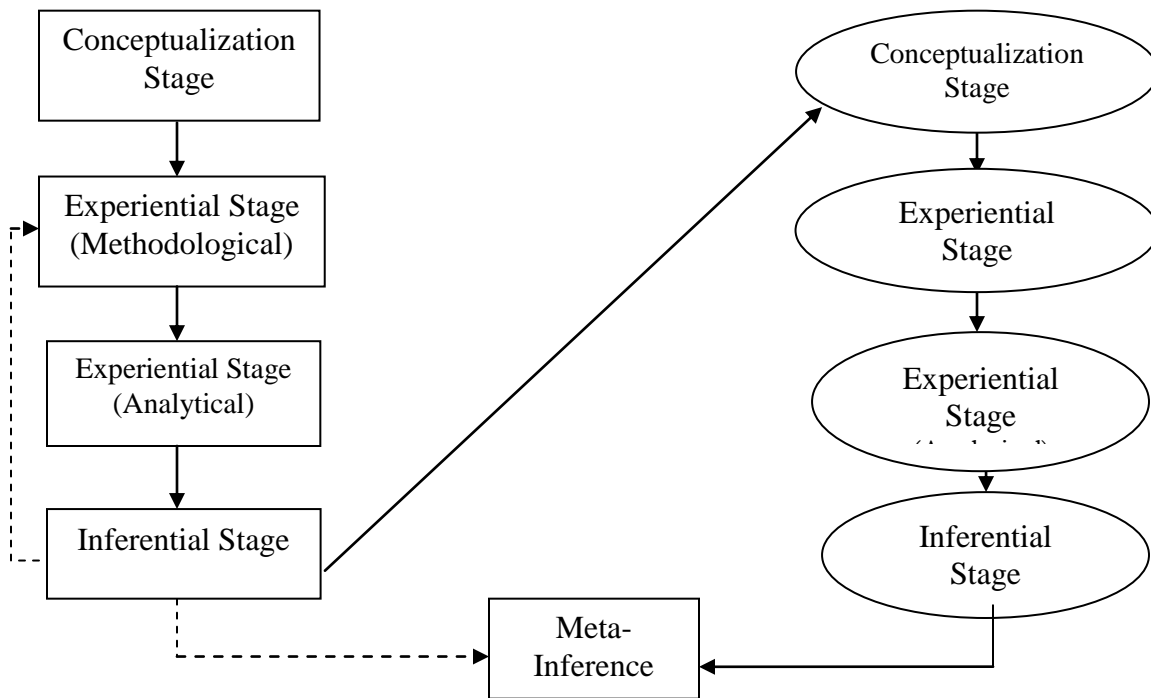


Figure 3.2: Sequential Mixed-Methods Design (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 154)

Target Population and Sample

The target population for this study is ALs within Level III and higher institutions of higher education in the SACS region within the United States. The sample for this study was chosen carefully. Total SACS membership of 804 institutions as of July 2010 was narrowed through application of the criteria below:

- Only member institutions accredited 10 years or more were included. Those with application or candidate status, or those that had not been through a decennial reaffirmation process were removed.

- The sample was limited to institutions with decennial reaffirmation dates from 2008-2013, inclusive. These institutions would have met three important criteria:
 - recently gone through the full reaffirmation process, which takes up to four years;
 - using current SACS core requirements, comprehensive standards, and federal requirements; and
 - the liaisons all would have been subject to the AL policy statement approved and published by SACS in 2007 (see Appendix 1).
- Private, for-profit institutions were removed from the sample as their missions and organizations typically are quite dissimilar from public, or private not-for-profit colleges and universities.
- Institutions outside the United States were eliminated due to potential language barriers.
- The sample was limited to include schools approved at Level III or higher, which means they are all four-year institutions offering baccalaureate and/or graduate degrees.
- Finally, the institution at which the researcher serves as an AL was excluded.

The final sample of 215 colleges and universities may be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3.1 presents a frequency summary of the study sample, with the reaffirmation year reflected in the columns. The first three rows of the table indicate the number of public or private institutions reviewed each year, subtotaled. The bottom half of the table indicates the number of institutions at each level for each reaffirmation year.

Table 3.1: Description of Institutions Included in Study Sample

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	TOTAL
Public	12	10	22	17	11	15	87
Private	21	28	16	24	26	12	128
Subtotal	33	38	38	41	37	27	215
Level III	10	14	17	15	20	7	84
Level IV*	3	0	0	5	2	2	12
Level V	14	16	10	12	12	8	72
Level VI	6	8	11	9	3	10	47
Subtotal	33	38	38	41	37	27	215

*The notably small number of Level IV institutions may be explained by the fact that the only difference between Levels III and IV is the approval for the institution to offer an Educational Specialist degree.

Procedure

At the SACSCOC 2010 Annual Meeting, I was encouraged to schedule a phone conference with the chief of staff and the director of training to discuss details of my research objectives. This phone meeting was quite positive, and I was further encouraged. The chief of staff discussed my proposal with the SACSCOC president, who expressed support subject to me (a) signing and returning an official SACS Confidentiality Form, (b) sharing the results of my study with SACSCOC staff; and (c) agreeing to make a presentation of my study at a forthcoming annual meeting, if invited. In support of my research, SACS would do the following:

1. Inform the Level III - VI institutional Accreditation Liaisons of my project;
2. Encourage Accreditation Liaisons' voluntary participation in my research;
3. Request Accreditation Liaisons' permission for SACS to share their individual e-mail addresses with me;
4. Forward to me the list of authorized participants;

5. Forward my proposal to SACSCOC staff and invite them to share their feedback with me directly; and,
6. Set up meetings for me with SACSCOC staff to discuss the project and obtain feedback on my instruments.

I agreed to the requests of the Commission, and they followed through by sending a letter of encouragement to the ALs (see Appendix 5). Within three hours of SACS sending the e-mail letter to my research population of 215 ALs, nearly 150, or 70%, had responded they would participate in the study.

As a next step in the research project development process, I followed the Louisiana State University (LSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. Under advisement from my dissertation chair, I requested an exemption from institutional oversight based on the following criteria: the project involved a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge; the research did not involve vulnerable populations; and the responses could not harm participants if made public. I also requested a waiver of signed informed consent because the research presented no more than reasonable risk of harm to subjects and involved no procedures for which written consent is normally required. Finally, I submitted with the packet a signed Security of Data Form attesting to my commitment to follow LSU's policies and practices for security of confidential data, and a copy of my certificate of completion of the National Institutes of Health Human Subjects Training for protecting human subjects research participants was also included. LSU's IRB approved the request, number E5282, effective 2/21/2011 through 2/09/2014.

Phase I: Quantitative

Phase one of the research study involved collection and analysis of quantitative data (see Appendix 6). An on-line survey was administered to ALs who gave COC staff permission to share their contact information with me. I chose an on-line survey method for several reasons. On-line survey research is an effective way to access specific populations, is more time-efficient for the researcher and respondents, and costs less than other methods of survey administration (Wright, 2005). Disadvantages for on-line survey administration have also been cited in the literature. Wright (2005) noted the two most prevalent concerns about electronic data collection involve sampling and access. This study had a defined sample and access to participants was secured prior to survey administration. Respondents indicated their willingness, if not eagerness, to participate in the study. Moreover, on-line surveys are a university-appropriate method for professional communication and data collection and are also well-ingrained into the academic culture.

The quantitative phase of this study was based on Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) tailored design, to achieve ideal levels of quality and quantity of research responses. The tailored design involved three major elements: (a) reducing all types of survey error that might compromise the data collected, (b) developing and implementing a strategic communication plan intended to render the highest possible response rate, and (c) fostering sponsorship for and population interest in the execution of the study. First, the possibility for survey error in this study was minimal. There generally are four types of survey error (Groves, 1989); Table 3.2 presents these, as well as how they are addressed in this study.

The quantitative survey instrument was researcher-developed. Best practices in survey design, including types of questions, item construction, measurement/response scales, and

organization, as presented by Church and Wacławski (1998), Dillman, et al. (2009), and Fowler (2009) were followed to improve reliability and validity. That said, most of the questions on the survey were derived purposefully from the SACS Accreditation Liaison job description (see Appendix 1). Other than demographic characteristics, almost all items exploring the extent to which respondents' professional and organizational characteristics fit those recommended by SACS.

Table 3.2: Descriptions of Survey Error and Implications for Current Research

Survey Error Type	Description	Implications for Current Research
Coverage Error	Results from exclusion of certain members in a possible sample population because of the method of survey distribution	I confirmed all potential respondents had access to and use e-mail regularly.
Sampling Error	Results from limitations of the survey sample	The survey was distributed to a census sample.
Non-Response Error	Results when there is an important difference between those who respond to a survey and those who do not	Most of the potential respondents in this study expressed interest prior to administering the survey. Most of the population also was interested in the results of this research project.
Measurement Error	Results from poorly designed questions, misinterpretation of questions, unintended responses, or respondents providing false data	Researcher-developed items involved personal characteristics that likely will not be misunderstood. Most of the survey items incorporated language taken verbatim from the SACS AL policy statement.

Reynolds, Sharp, and Anderson's (2009) study of respondents' timeliness and issues of design, as well as Shaefer and Dillman's (1998) study provided the basis for two practical decisions for administration of the on-line survey. Reynolds et al. found 60% of their sample responded within two days. Shaefer and Dillman received a 76% response rate within four days of their survey launch. Findings in both studies indicated a sharp reduction in response rate, even after reminders were sent, after the first week the survey was on-line. Second, I redesigned my

instrument to remove matrix response formats after learning Reynolds et al. (2009) found respondents completing matrix-style questions had notably, although not significantly, less variation in their responses than did those respondents addressing single-item questions.

I developed a survey instrument for on-line administration to collect quantitative data. The consent script, cover letter, survey introduction, survey questions, and closing verbiage may be found in Appendix 6. Survey questions are grouped into four categories: (a) three general questions about the AL's institution; (b) 48 questions about the demographic, educational, and professional characteristics and opinions about responsibilities and professional development; (c) eight questions about the respondent's perception of the level of challenge they experience carrying out SACS-specified AL responsibilities; and (d) 10 questions about the extent to which the respondent follows SACS' recommendations for being best-prepared to meet the responsibilities of the AL position over time.

Data quality was assured by inspecting accurate data entry, confirming the number of valid cases, ensuring no missing values, examining ranges of variable values and frequencies, and inspecting the datasets for outliers and unusual values. Group statistics, including sample size, means, standard deviations, and standard errors of means were also confirmed.

Statistical procedures were used as appropriate techniques for addressing each objective of the study. This was an exploratory research project. No hypotheses were formed. Most of the data collected were categorical and ordinal. Measures of central tendency, frequencies, and correlations were relied upon for inferences, although analysis of variance was used to examine interesting results of more basic statistical tools. SPSS/PASW software was used for data analysis.

Phase II: Qualitative

Phase two of the research study involved telephone interviews to collect qualitative data. According to the sequential research design, selection of participants for interviews depended on the results of the quantitative phase. Respondents to the web survey were invited to participate in interviews, which provided a more in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions of the forces that support or challenge them in their role as SACS ALs.

The sample for the qualitative phase of the study was purposeful, whereby participants who agreed to be interviewed were intentionally selected because they were expected to best answer the research questions and provide unique or interesting perspectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two-to-three ALs representing each institutional level (Level III, Level IV, Level V, and Level VI) were chosen for interviews. Those who expressed willingness to participate in the interviews but who were not called were sent an e-mail informing them their willingness is appreciated but their participation was not necessary.

Respondents who were chosen to participate in the phone interviews had the interviews scheduled at their convenience. Participants were sent the questions in advance of the interviews and advised the interviews would be recorded and transcribed. The consent script that was used at the beginning of each interview may be found in Appendix 7. The purpose of the interviews was to (a) better understand respondents' answers to questions in the on-line survey, and (b) explore some of the forces they thought supported and/or hindered them in their role as SACS AL.

Interviewees were advised the interviews will be confidential, although recorded. They were reminded the overarching purpose of the study was to increase understanding of and support for the AL role. I also made them aware of my intention to send them the transcription of

the interview after it was produced, so they would have the opportunity to review and correct it if necessary. Guiding questions for the interviews are included in Appendix 7.

Data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously in qualitative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I conducted all phone interviews myself. The text obtained through the interviews were coded and analyzed for themes with the assistance of the NVIVO software program for qualitative data analysis. As advised by Creswell (2002), there are five core steps to be followed in analyzing the qualitative data collected:

1. preliminary review of transcripts with the researcher keeping analytic notes;
2. segmenting and labeling text, then coding the data;
3. grouping codes into themes;
4. associating related themes; and
5. writing a narrative.

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) elaborated on the importance of the analytic notes, or “memos,” included in number one above. In fact, they “cannot overstate the importance of writing analytic memos throughout the [research] process” (p. 291). These memos are described as short narratives written to a researcher’s colleague, friend, or herself /himself, about emerging themes, questions, insights, and research progress.

The quality of quantitative data is assessed using different methods than those employed when working with qualitative, or statistical, data. A process of verification, rather than traditional validity and reliability measures, is utilized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994), summarizing the literature on the topic of standards for quality, described five issues researchers should always consider: the objectivity/confirmability of qualitative work, or the degree to which the study is replicable; reliability/dependability/auditability, or the stability

of the research is consistent over time; internal validity/credibility/authenticity, or whether the findings are true (valid); external validity/transferability/fittingness, or the extent to which the findings of the study apply to other situations or are generalizable; and, utilization/application/action orientation, or the usefulness and value of the study to those involved in the project or to other audiences. Additionally, statements about the researcher's assumptions, biases or research frames, how participants for interviews were selected, and any other details that might be specific to the particular research project enhance the likelihood that the study could be replicated (Creswell, 2002).

Validity in quantitative research involves concepts of measurement and knowing, such as face validity, content validity, and predictive validity; in contrast, however, validity in qualitative research relies more on various ways of understanding research results: “. . .descriptive (what happened in specific situations); interpretive (what it meant to the people involved); theoretical (concepts, and their relationships, used to explain actions and meanings); and evaluative (judgments of the worth or value of actions and meanings)” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278).

To validate the findings in the second, qualitative, phase of this study, I followed the four methods suggested by Creswell (2002). Using triangulation, I converged the responses of individual participants. After the interviews were transcribed, I shared his or her transcripts with each participant and asked them to verify accuracy. Third, I documented results completely and comprehensively. Last, my dissertation chair agreed to conduct a thorough review of the transcripts and served in a role similar to that of a third-party or external auditor of my findings, as encouraged by Patton (1990): “Important insights can emerge from the different ways in which two people look at the same set of data, a form of analytical triangulation” (p. 383).

Research Lenses

Mixed-methods researchers must understand quantitative and qualitative research design, data analysis, and implications for inferences that develop from their findings. Qualitative researchers rely on different methods to establish validity than do their quantitatively-oriented colleagues (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco Jr., 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Consumers of research are best-served when they understand the lens through which one views research, as well as the paradigm used to interpret findings.

Creswell and Miller (2000) discussed the researcher's lens, describing it as a "viewpoint for establishing validity in a study . . . established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study" (p. 125). They contrasted the lens used in qualitative research with that used in quantitative studies, noting quantitative researchers focus on internal and external validity accomplished through the results of specific research designs.

This study is a mixed-methods design and by definition includes quantitative and qualitative lenses. The latter, however, is the focus of this discussion, as determining validity in qualitative research has been less established historically in the academic research community. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), there are three lenses through which validity, or credibility, in qualitative research can be examined: the researcher's lens, study participants' lenses, and lenses of reviewers external to the project. All three lenses were utilized in the qualitative phase of this research.

Researcher's Lens. I am an accreditation liaison and have been a professional in higher education for 19 years. My abbreviated professional biography may be found following the appendices at the end of this document. I have worked in or had very close working relationships with people in almost every area of college and university academic and administrative operations. Everything I have ever done in higher education has pertained to continuous quality improvement. I am in my fourth year as an AL in the SACS region; completed the certification program offered by the Society for College and University Planners; participated in the Harvard Institute for Performance Excellence in Higher Education; participated twice in the highly esteemed assessment institute at Indiana University and Purdue University Indianapolis; attended seven professional development events with SACS; and served as an accreditation peer reviewer for seven postsecondary institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. My long-standing memberships in a diverse range of professional associations also have served me well. I have found the AL role challenging, intriguing, energizing, exhausting, and personally and professionally satisfying.

My lens enabled me to conceptualize and carry out a research study about the role of the AL, but also supported my ability to carry on meaningful conversations with my colleagues as I collected qualitative data. Altheide and Johnson (1994) likely would endorse my qualification as a credible researcher, because they stressed the importance of “validity as reflexive accounting” (p. 489), in which the researcher, topic, and process of drawing conclusions are integrated to form knowledge.

Participants' Lenses. I actively sought feedback from SACSCOC personnel in developing the research design for this study. The qualitative survey was reviewed by four Commission staff members, three of whom have doctoral degrees. All had been with the agency

more than three years. For the qualitative phase of the study, interview participants were engaged in assuring credibility of results. Each participant was e-mailed the complete transcript of the interview and asked to respond to the researcher with any questions, comments, or changes. The purpose for these reviews was twofold: first, to check facts; and second, to ensure the essence of their intended meaning in oral communication was captured in the written account of the interview.

Lenses of Reviewers External to the Study. The third lens employed to help establish validity was the inclusion of reviews of transcripts by people external to the study. My dissertation chair served as a second-reader for all transcripts. Individually, she coded the interviews, made written notes, and established themes. I followed a very similar process, and then the two of us discussed and reconciled our perceptions of meaning, themes, and implications.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study was to increase knowledge about and support for accreditation liaisons (ALs) in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges (COC), or SACSCOC, region. Toward this end, the research explored the characteristics of the professionals who fill the role, as well as the factors that support or challenge them as they carry out their SACSCOC-related responsibilities.

A sequential mixed-methods research design was employed. First, a survey was administered on-line, exploring characteristics and behaviors of ALs. The survey was sent to 215 institutional liaisons. One hundred thirty-one individuals responded, resulting in a response rate of 61%. Objectives one through six were explored largely through these quantitative data. The second phase of the study built upon the first phase and involved phone interviews with a purposeful sample of 12 of the survey respondents. Objective 7 was the focus of the qualitative phase of the study and is described below.

Objective 1

The first objective of the study was to describe SACS ALs on selected demographic, institutional, educational, and professional characteristics.

Demographic characteristics included gender, race, and ethnicity.

▪ Gender

Respondents were equally represented in terms of gender. Of the 131 respondents that provided their gender demographic, 66 were female and 65 were male.

▪ Race

Race was defined as it is currently defined by the United States government: Hispanic or Not Hispanic. One hundred twenty-seven, or 97%, self-identified as Not Hispanic; the remaining four were Hispanic.

▪ Ethnicity

Just under 95% (n = 122) of all study participants were White, as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Ethnicity Distribution of Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Ethnicity	N	Percentage
White	122	94.6
Black/African American	4	3.1
Asian	2	1.6
American Indian/Native Alaskan	1	0.8
Total	129	100.0

Note. Two respondents did not answer this question on the survey.

Institutional characteristics included institution type, institution level, and institutional enrollment.

▪ Institution Type

The sample included ALs from public and private not-for-profit institutions. Of those responding, 80 (62%) were from private colleges or universities and 49 (38%) were employed by public institutions. Two respondents did not indicate their institution type.

▪ Institution Level

SACS categorizes institutions into levels based on the degrees they are approved to confer upon students. The research sample included respondents from four different institution levels defined by SACS as follows:

- Level III – approved to offer master’s degrees and lower
- Level IV – approved to offer educational specialist degrees and lower
- Level V – approved to offer three or fewer doctoral degrees and lower
- Level VI – approved to offer four or more doctoral degrees and lower

As indicated in Table 4.2, all institution types were fairly well-represented among the respondents. Most (n = 45; 34.6%) respondents were from Level V institutions. The number of Level IV institutions represented in the quantitative findings (n = 10; 7.7%) reflects an overrepresentation of the general population of SACS institutions. There are notably fewer (n = 22; 2.7%) Level IV institutions than other institution types in the SACSCOC Region. Of the original sample, 15% were Level IV; therefore, the number of respondents in the sample was expected to be fairly consistent with the target population.

Table 4.2: Institution Level Distribution of Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Institution Level	N	Percentage
Level III	38	29.2
Level IV	10	7.7
Level V	45	34.6
Level VI	37	28.5
Total	130	100.0

Note. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

▪ Institutional Enrollment

Respondents were from a broad range of institution sizes; however, as reflected in Table 4.3, over 70% were from institutions with enrollments of less than 10,000 students. Most (n = 74; 56.5%) were from small colleges or universities with enrollments of less than 5,000. Nineteen participants were from mid-size institutions with enrollments between 10,000 and 20,000, and about the same number were from large institutions with student bodies of over 20,000.

Table 4.3: Enrollment Sizes of Institutions of Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Enrollment	N	Percentage
0-5,000	74	56.5
5,001-10,000	21	16.0
10,001-15,000	10	7.6
15,001-20,000	9	6.9
20,001 or More	17	13.0
Total	131	100.0

Professional characteristics included the following factors:

- a) AL title;
- b) position to which the AL reports;
- c) AL position type;
- d) AL tenure status;
- e) time spent as a professional in higher education;
- f) higher education area of most experience;
- g) time in academic affairs, including teaching;
- h) time in administration;
- i) time in student affairs;
- j) time in areas other than academic affairs, administration, or student affairs;
- k) years at current institution;
- l) prior AL experience;
- m) years as AL at current institution;
- n) primary responsibilities; and

o) accountability, accuracy, and integrity of documents sent to SACS.

▪ AL Title

One hundred twenty-seven ALs provided their official institutional titles. For the purposes of this study, senior faculty was defined as associate professor or higher. Senior administrators were defined as executive director or higher. Most (n = 102, or 80.3%) of the AL titles provided were at senior levels: nine were executive vice presidents or senior vice chancellors; 30 were vice presidents or vice chancellors; six were provosts; one was a chief operating officer; 16 were assistant or associate vice presidents or vice chancellors; 22 were assistant or association provosts; two were executive directors; six were deans; three were associate deans; and seven were professors. A full accounting of official titles provided by respondents is included as Appendix 8.

▪ Position to which the AL Reports

SACS recommends that the AL report directly to the president or chief executive officer of an institution. Of 131 study participants, 130 indicated the position to which they reported. While 68 (52.3%) participants reported to the CEO, almost half of the respondents (n = 63, 47.7%) did not. Most (n = 51, or 81%) of the ALs not reporting to the CEO indicated they reported to their institution's chief academic officer (CAO).

▪ AL Position Type (Senior Administrator or Senior Faculty Member)

SACSCOC's Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement includes a recommendation that the president or CEO of an institution appoint a senior administrator or senior faculty member to the role. These roles are not defined in the policy statement. Senior administrators were defined by the researcher as executive director or higher. Senior faculty members were defined by the researcher as faculty at the associate or full professor levels. Participants were also given the option to select an "other" category and write in their own description of their position type.

Table 4.4: Position Types of Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Position Type	N	Percentage
Senior Administrator	91	69.5
Senior Faculty Member	24	18.3
Other	16	12.2
Total	131	100.0

Note. Respondents had the ability to write in their position types if they were not senior administrators or senior faculty; however, these data are not provided herein in order to protect the confidentiality of study participants.

Table 4.4 reflects the number and percentage of respondents in each category. Nearly 70% self-identified as senior administrators and just under 20% as senior faculty members. The remaining 16 participants selected “other”: four indicated they were both senior administration and senior faculty; nine were directors; one was an associate director; one was a director and adjunct faculty member; and one did not specify the position type.

▪ Tenure Status

Over 60% (n = 81; 61.8%) of respondents were not tenured. Of these, most were either in non-tenure-granting institutions or were not in tenure-track positions. Nearly 40% (n = 50) of liaisons were awarded tenure within their institutions. Only two of the respondents in the study were untenured, in tenure-track positions, at tenure-granting institutions.

▪ Time Spent as a Professional in Higher Education

Participants were asked to provide the number of years they had been professionals in higher education. Responses were grouped into the following categories presented in Table 4.5:

1) 1-4 years; 2) 5-9 years; 3) 10-19 years; 4) 20-29 years; 5) 30-39 years; and, 6) 40 or more years.

Table 4.5: Number of Years Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Spent as Higher Education Professionals

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
1-4	5	3.8
5-9	3	2.3
10-19	36	27.5
20-29	43	32.8
30-39	34	26.0
40 or More	10	7.6
Total	131	100.0

^a $M = 23.96$; $SD = 10.30$

The range in years participants spent in higher education was three to 48 ($M = 23.96$; $SD = 10.30$). Only 6.1% of participants had been in higher education under 10 years. The largest group of respondents indicated they had held positions in higher education between 20 and 29 years. Over 30% had been working in colleges and/or universities for more than 30 years. These findings clearly indicate liaisons are senior faculty or administrators with a great deal of postsecondary experience.

▪ Higher Education Area of Most Experience

Nearly 65% ($n = 51$) of all respondents indicated most of their professional experience in higher education is in the area of academic affairs, including teaching. See Table 4.6. About a third ($n = 42$; 32.1%) had spent the majority of their postsecondary careers in administrative positions. One respondent had experience mostly in student services.

Table 4.6: Area of Higher Education in which Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Spent the Most Time in Higher Education

Area of Experience	N	Percentage
Academic Affairs	85	64.9
Administration	42	32.1
Student Services	1	0.8
Other	3	2.3
Total	131	100.0

Note. Respondents had the ability to write in the area in which they had spent most of their time as professionals in higher education if not in academic affairs, administration, or student services; however, these data are not provided herein in order to protect the confidentiality of study participants.

▪ Time in Academic Affairs, Including Teaching

Ratio data were collected regarding the number of years participants had spent working in academic affairs, which was defined by the researcher to include teaching. Responses, ranging from zero to 48 years ($M = 18.88$; $SD = 12.39$), were grouped into the following categories: 1) None; 2) 1-4 years; 3) 5-9 years; 4) 10-19 years; 5) 20-29 years; 6) 30-39 years; and 7) 40 or more years. Table 4.7 reflects that most ($n = 39$; 30.2%) participants spent between 10 and 19 years in academic affairs. Almost half ($n = 62$; 48.1%) of the respondents had served in academic affairs positions 20 or more years.

▪ Time in Administration

Table 4.7: The Amount of Time Study Participants Spent Working in Academic Affairs, Including Teaching

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
None	13	10.1
1-4	7	5.4

(Table Continue)

5-9	8	6.2
10-19	39	30.2
20-29	30	23.3
30-39	24	18.6
40 or More	8	6.2
Total	129	100.0

Note. Two respondents did not answer this question on the survey.

^a $M = 18.88$; $SD = 12.39$

As indicated in Table 4.8 below, a nearly-perfect bell curve was found in the results for respondents' years of experience in higher education administration, with a range from zero to 45 ($M = 14.98$; $SD = 10.05$). Participants' time spent in administrative positions ranged from zero to 40 or more. As Table 4.8 indicates, 51 had been administrators between 10 and 19 years.

Table 4.8: The Amount of Time Study Participants Spent Working in Higher Education Administration

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
None	2	1.5
1-4	19	14.6
5-9	20	15.4
10-19	51	39.2
20-29	22	16.9
30-39	14	10.8
40 or More	2	1.5
Total	130	100.0

Note. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

^a $M = 14.98$; $SD = 10.05$

▪ Time in Student Affairs

Student affairs was the area of least experience among ALs. Participants indicated the number of years they had spent working in student affairs. Responses ranged from zero to 13 ($M = 1.21$; $SD = 2.9$) and were categorized by the researcher as follows: 1) None; 2) 1-4 years; 3) 5-9 years; and 4) 10-13 years. Results are presented in Table 4.9. Nearly 80% ($n = 97$; 78.9%) had never worked in student affairs. Of the eight respondents with the most experience, five reported 10 years.

Table 4.9: The Amount of Time Study Participants Spent Working in Student Affairs

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
None	97	78.9
1-4	11	8.9
5-9	7	5.7
10-13	8	6.5
Total	123	100.0

Note. Eight respondents did not answer this question on the survey.

^a $M = 1.21$; $SD = 2.9$

▪ Time in Areas Other than Academic Affairs, Administration, or Student Affairs

Approximately 75% of respondents had no experience outside of academic affairs, administration, or student affairs.

▪ Years at Current Institution

Study participants had a broad range (Less than one to 44; $M = 16.27$; $SD = 11.35$) of number of years spent working at their current institutions. As presented in Table 4.10, 83 (63.4%) of those responding to this item had worked at their college or university for 10 or more years.

Table 4.10: The Amount of Time Study Participants Worked at their Current Institution

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
Less than 1	1	0.8
1-4	19	14.5
5-9	22	16.8
10-19	43	32.8
20-29	28	21.4
30-39	12	9.2
40 or More	6	4.6
Total	131	100.0

^a $M = 16.27$; $SD = 11.35$

▪ Prior AL Experience

Twenty-three, or 17.6% of study participants had professional experience as an accreditation liaison before being appointed in their current AL role; of these, 16 had performed those responsibilities in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools region.

▪ Years as Current Institution's AL

Respondents indicated they had served as their current institutions SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison from one to 33 years. See Table 4.11. Almost half ($n = 64$; 49.6%; $M = 6.78$; $SD = 6.09$) had been the AL for four or fewer years and almost 75% ($n = 122$; 73.6%) had been their institution's liaison for less than 10 years.

Table 4.11: The Amount of Time Study Participants Worked at Their Current Institution as Accreditation Liaison

Number of Years	N ^a	Percentage
1-4	64	49.6

(Table Continue)

5-9	31	24.0
10-19	27	20.9
20-29	5	3.9
30-39	2	1.6
Total	129	100.0

Note. Two respondents did not answer this question on the survey.

^a $M = 6.78$; $SD = 6.09$

▪ Primary Responsibilities

Respondents were asked to provide the researcher with their primary responsibilities, listing up to five broad areas. All 131 study participants wrote in answers. Of course, all indicated responsibility for accreditation. Other areas follow in descending order of frequency reported: institutional research ($n = 65$; 49.6%); academic affairs ($n = 56$; 42.7%); assessment ($n = 40$; 30.5%); strategic planning ($n = 34$; 26.0%); then teaching and institutional effectiveness tied ($n = 29$; 22.1%); followed closely by responsibility for directing a program ($n = 28$; 21.4%). Other areas noted by several respondents ($n \leq 12$; $\leq 9.2\%$) were technology/information systems management and budget/finance.

▪ Documents Sent to SACS

Participants were asked whether they felt personally accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the documents they signed and submitted to SACS. Results are indicated in Table 4.12. Every respondent indicated she/he felt personally accountable for the documents they submitted to SACSCOC. Almost 7% ($n = 9$; 6.9%) indicated they were not certain of the accuracy of the data/reports they submitted to the Commission. Only one respondent was not always certain of the integrity in which SACSCOC reports were prepared.

Table 4.12: Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Responses Regarding Accountability and Certainty of Accuracy of Documents Submitted to SACS

	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Personally Accountable	131	100.0	0	0	131	100.0
Certain of Accuracy	121	93.1	9	6.9	130*	100.0
Certain of Integrity	130	99.2	1	0.8	131	100.0

*Note. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

Objective 2

The second objective of the study was to understand whether a majority of SACS ALs sought the role originally and continued their aspiration to serve in the role. Factors in this area included whether the AL sought the role initially by applying for the position or was appointed; whether the AL wanted the role if the position was obtained through appointment; and whether the AL wanted the role at the time of the study.

▪ **Method of Appointment**

Almost all (n = 123; 93.9%) ALs reported being appointed to their role. Eight applied for positions that included the AL role.

▪ **If Appointed, Wanted the AL Role**

A clear majority of 114 (87%) of study participants wanted the AL role within their institutions at the time they were appointed. The remaining 17 (13%) were unsolicited appointments by the institution's president or CEO.

▪ **AL Continues to Want the Role**

One hundred eighteen (90.1%) of the 131 participants responded they would continue in their role as AL if given the choice.

Objective 3

The third objective of the study was to identify trends in role-critical institutional areas in which liaisons had responsibility but did not have decision-making authority. Respondents were asked whether they had areas of responsibility for which they did not have authority and, if so, to explain the response.

▪ Responsibility Without Authority

All respondents indicated whether they had responsibility without authority. Results were split almost evenly, although more (n = 70; 53.4%) indicated they did indeed have responsibilities in areas for which they did not have authority. Participants answering this question affirmatively were asked to explain their responses. A complete accounting of their comments is provided in Appendix 9. Responses of note are quoted below.

- This is difficult to answer. As a SACS liaison who is on the administrative side of the institution, rather than the academic side, most of what I feel responsible for is outside of my authority.
- As accreditation liaison, I am responsible for assuring compliance by persons who do not answer to me (i.e., over whom I have no authority). Substantive change compliance offers the greatest challenge at the present time.
- My role is advisory to my superiors, but my job as liaison is to keep the institution in compliance with all SACS criteria. I have to use persuasion rather than direct authority to influence changes needed to keep us in compliance.
- No authority to make areas conform to compliance requirements
- Pretty much everything!
- I feel responsible for all areas of SACS compliance yet have little authority over anything beyond providing data and helping others collect data. I don't even have authority over whether they use the data. I have no units under me, am not on the senior management team, and the only supervisory authority I have is for my office staff.
- I am responsible for the efficacy of the planning process, but I am not a member of Senior Leadership which has the greatest influence on annual institutional priorities.

- Responsibility to ensure compliance with requirements and standards, but no authority to directly address most issues. Must advise, recommend, remind and foretell doom.
- I have responsibility for ensuring that the University is in compliance with the standards; but no authority to direct specific persons to do things required for compliance. Such authority is housed in the Office of the Provost. I merely convey to the Provost that attention needs to be directed to this and that. Of course, this assumes that problematic areas come to my attention.
- There are too many to list but the most significant is the general area of decision support--data collection/reporting etc. This is so critical to SACS compliance but a different executive sets the priorities.
- I may see areas that are not in compliance, but I have no direct authority to bring them into compliance. I must appeal to the Provost, who often must appeal to the President, for direction to bring things into compliance.

Objective 4

Objective four was to describe SACS ALs on selected educational and professional development characteristics and needs.

▪ **Educational Characteristics**

Educational attainment of ALs ranged across degree types. While 111 (85.4%) respondents had doctorates, the rest did not have terminal degrees. Fifteen (11.5%) had master's degrees, three (2.3%) had bachelor's degrees, and one (0.8%) had an educational specialist degree. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

▪ **Professional Development Characteristics**

Respondents were asked whether they had professional development in areas related to AL responsibilities since they had become liaison for their institutions and whether they wanted or needed additional professional development in order to be more effective in their role as AL. Results are indicated in Table 4.13 and Table 4.14.

Table 4.13: Professional Development in Area Since Being Appointed as AL of the Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Development Areas	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N*	%
Accreditation	122	95.3	6	4.7	128	100.0
Strategic Planning	79	63.7	45	36.3	124	100.0
Institutional Assessment	113	88.3	15	11.7	128	100.0
Program Assessment	110	85.9	18	14.1	128	100.0
Institutional Effectiveness	109	86.5	17	13.5	126	100.0
Institutional Research	70	56.5	54	43.5	124	100.0
Budget/Finance	43	36.1	76	63.9	119	100.0
Change Management	44	37.3	74	62.7	118	100.0
Organizational Development	39	32.5	81	67.5	120	100.0
Project Management	32	27.1	86	72.9	118	100.0

Note. For each total response rate less than 131, the difference between the number responding and 131 is the number of respondents who did not answer the question on the survey.

▪ Professional Development Needs

Table 4.14

Wants or Needs for Additional Professional Development in Areas of Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study

Development Needs	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N*	%
Accreditation	64	54.2	54	45.8	118	100.0
Strategic Planning	58	47.9	63	52.1	121	100.0
Institutional Assessment	68	58.1	49	41.9	117	100.0
Program Assessment	66	55.9	52	44.1	118	100.0

(Table Continue)

Institutional Effectiveness	71	60.2	47	39.8	118	100.0
Institutional Research	45	39.5	69	60.5	114	100.0
Budget/Finance	54	45.4	65	54.6	119	100.0
Change Management	58	47.5	64	52.5	122	100.0
Organizational Development	58	49.2	60	50.8	118	100.0
Project Management	45	37.5	75	62.5	120	100.0

Note. For each total response rate less than 131, the difference between the number responding and 131 is the number of respondents who did not answer the question on the survey.

Objective 5

The fifth objective of this study was to explore the level of challenge SACS ALs experienced carrying out SACS-specified AL responsibilities.

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of challenge they experienced carrying out the responsibilities SACS sets forth for liaisons in the Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement. Not all liaisons would have found it necessary to engage in all of the responsibilities, because some areas are specific to reaffirmation of accreditation or other work that is infrequent. Therefore, “I have not done this” was also included as a survey response category. SACS sets forth eight specific responsibilities for liaisons; each is listed in Table 4.15 with participant responses.

Table 4.15: Level of Challenge Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Indicated They Experience Carrying out the Responsibilities SACS Sets Forth for the Role

Responsibility	$M^{a,b}$	SD	Category ^c
Serving as a resource person during the decennial review process and helping prepare for and coordinating reaffirmation and other accrediting visits.	3.98	.939	Always Challenging
Ensuring that compliance with accreditation requirements is incorporated into the planning and evaluation process of the institution.	3.71	.802	Always Challenging
<i>(Table Continue)</i>			

Familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the Commission's accrediting policies and procedures, and with particular sections of the accrediting standards and Commission policies that have application to certain aspects of the campus (e.g., library, continuing education) especially when such documents are adopted or revised.	3.53	.807	Often Challenging
Notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission.	3.34	.903	Often Challenging
Maintaining a file of all accreditation materials, such as reports related to the decennial review; accreditation committee reports; accreditation manuals, standards, and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence from accrediting offices.	3.14	.846	Often Challenging
Ensuring that electronic institutional data collected by the Commission is accurate and timely.	3.01	.804	Sometimes Challenging
Serving as a contact person for Commission staff. This includes encouraging institutional staff to route routine inquiries about the <i>Principles of Accreditation</i> and accreditation policies and processes through the Accreditation Liaison, who will contact Commission staff, if necessary, and ensuring that e-mail from the Commission office does not get trapped in the institution's spam filter.	2.77	.766	Sometimes Challenging
Coordinating the preparation of the annual profiles and any other reports requested by the Commission.	2.68	.700	Sometimes Challenging

^a Response points scale: 0 = Never Challenging; 1 = Sometimes Challenging; 2 = Often Challenging; 3 = Always Challenging; 4 = I have not done this

^b Interpretive points scale: 1 = Never Challenging; 2 = Sometimes Challenging; 3 = Often Challenging; 4 = Always Challenging

^c Category ranges: < 3.11 = Sometimes Challenging; 3.12 – 3.55 = Often Challenging; 3.56 > = Always Challenging

Objective 6

Objective six was to determine the extent to which liaisons had followed SACS' recommendations in preparing to meet AL responsibilities. Each of the responsibilities is listed below, exactly as stated in SACS Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement (see Appendix 1), followed by the results of the survey.

SACS Recommendation One: Learn about the Commission on Colleges and the way it works by reviewing the following sections of its Website (www.sacscoc.org): general

information about the Commission; the *Principles of Accreditation*; policies and publications of the Commission; institutional resources, including handbooks, manuals, and guides; upcoming meetings and events.

Table 4.16: Frequency at Which Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Visit the SACS Website

Frequency	N	Percentage
Weekly	31	23.8
Bi-Weekly	21	16.2
Monthly	61	46.9
Quarterly	14	10.8
Three or Fewer Times Per Year	2	2.3
Total	130	100.0

Note. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

SACS Recommendation Two: Maintain contact with the Commission staff member assigned to your institution.

Table 4.17: Frequency at Which Respondents in the SACS Region Who Participated in This Study Contact Their Commission Staff Members

Frequency	N	Percentage
Bi-Weekly	2	1.5
Monthly	21	16.2
Quarterly	38	29.2
Three or Fewer Times Per Year	67	51.5
Never	2	1.5
Total	130	100.0

Note. One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

SACS Recommendation Three: Get involved in Commission activities by attending the annual meeting and serving as a peer evaluator.

Survey participants were asked whether they had participated in a Substantive Change Drive-in Workshop. Of 130 respondents, 70 (53.8%) answered affirmatively and 60 answered negatively. One person did not respond.

The survey also included inquiries regarding ALs' attendance at the SACS annual meeting. First, participants were asked how many times they had attended the annual meeting. The 130 respondents to the question attended the meeting between one and 30 times. Over half (53.13%) had attended the annual meeting more than five times. One AL did not respond.

When asked whether they were likely to attend the next annual meeting, 74.8% responded "yes," and another 21.4% responded "probably." As a note, AL expenses related to SACSCOC annual meeting attendance are covered by their respective institutions.

Attendance at the Quality Enhancement and Accreditation Institute, commonly referred to by professionals in the region as the "summer institute," also was explored: n = 47, or 36.2%, had never attended; n = 48, or 36.9%, had attended once; n = 25, or 19.2%, had attended twice. Therefore, over 56% of study participants had attended the summer institute once or twice. Six participants had attended three times, three participants had attended four times, and one survey participant had attended five times. One person did not answer this question.

Finally, the survey included queries regarding ALs' experience serving as a peer evaluator for review of institutions other than their own. Almost half (43.8%) had never served on an On-Site Review Committee. About 40% (40.1%) had served on one to four On-Site Committees. Another 13.8% served as a site peer reviewer between five and 15 times. One

person indicated serving on 20 committees, one person on 25 committees, and one on 30 committees.

Most (n = 92; 70.8%) study participants had never served as a peer evaluator on an Off-Site Review Committee. About 20% had served on one committee, another 8.5% had served on two-to-three Off-Site Review Committees. Two respondents had served five times, one respondent indicated service 15 times, and one person did not respond.

SACS Recommendation Four: Become acquainted with the institution's accreditation history by reviewing past correspondence with the Commission and materials stemming from previous reaffirmation or substantive change reviews. Almost all study participants had followed the Commission's recommendation in this area. Ninety-five percent indicated they had reviewed their institution's historical accreditation documents as needed or more than was necessary.

SACS Recommendation Five: Ensure that reports to the Commission and significant correspondence from the Commission are archived for future reference. Only four participants responded they had not followed this recommendation.

Objective 7

The final objective of the study was to examine forces that support or hinder incumbent SACS ALs. These data were gathered in phase two of the research, through qualitative methods grounded in the theoretical framework of Kurt Lewin, as described above in Chapter 1. Lewin's work was based on the practical theory that an individual's actions are always the result of interacting individual and environmental factors. Lewin primarily was interested in human motivation: Positive or negative forces in one's environment interact with the individual's characteristics and space in time to create a continuum of sorts, in which the individual

experiences various levels of momentum toward (driving forces) or away from (blocking forces) goal attainment.

Respondents indicated willingness to participate in confidential interviews when they completed the on-line survey. I purposefully selected participants to interview in an effort to get the richest qualitative data to enhance my quantitative findings. I used several criteria in my selection process: institution level and type; position type; educational and professional characteristics; and the overall level of challenge they indicated they encountered fulfilling their SACS-specified responsibilities. Twelve interviewees were selected. Descriptors of the sample follow:

- 12 accreditation liaisons;
- three from each level—III, IV, V, and VI;
- two of the three from each level indicated they often or always were challenged in carrying out SACS-specified AL responsibilities;
- nine with doctoral degrees, three with master's degrees;
- six female, six male;
- seven reporting to the institutional chief executive officer and five reporting to the chief academic officer;
- eight senior administrators, two senior faculty, two directors;
- four tenured; eight in non-tenure-track positions;
- nine appointed as AL (three of whom did not want the appointment), three applied to be AL;
- four indicated they had responsibilities in areas for which they did not have appropriate authority to carry out those responsibilities;

- professional experience in higher education ranged from 14-48 years, with a median of 28.5 years and a mean of 29.8 years;
- seven had spent most of their postsecondary careers in academic affairs, four in administration, and one in another area;
- years at current institution ranged from three to 44, with a median of eight and a mean of 14.2 years;
- three had AL experience before their current appointments, nine did not; and
- years as AL at current institution ranged from 1.5 to 32, with a median of 3.5 and a mean of 7.6 years.

I personally contacted those selected for interviews to confirm their continued willingness to participate in the qualitative phase of the study, then followed up with an e-mail to each, outlining the main questions from which the interviews would branch. Those questions are listed below.

- 1) What are the driving forces, or ways you are supported, in your position?
- 2) What are the blocking forces, or challenges, you encounter carrying out your responsibilities?
- 3) How do you think these challenges could be overcome?
- 4) You noted you would (or would not) continue as accreditation liaison if given the choice. Why?
- 5) What aspects of the AL role and/or responsibilities do you find particularly interesting or curious?

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis, as described in Chapter 3.

Driving Forces

The questions above resulted in rich qualitative data regarding internal and external forces that drive liaison's motivation for and ability to fulfill their SACSCOC-related responsibilities. Themes that emerged related to driving forces included reporting lines, relationships/communication, positive impact on the institution, and professional experience/personal satisfaction.

Well, it's funny that I find it the most fascinating and exciting boring job in existence. From every outside standpoint this sounds like a nightmare position in some ways because your job is for the most part to get people to do something that they don't really want to do—or that somehow always seems a little bit extra in terms of how they define their job. So at one level it's kind of a pain, you know. It's also, you know, you look at a lot of surveys and a lot of data of different types and you move a lot of that around so there's a lot of just kind of almost – I wouldn't say clerical but for the lack of a better term just you know fairly clerical kind of work . . . on one level it seems like I'm white washing this fence all the time. On the other level it's a far more complex job, you know. (Case 20)

Factors that support ALs in their jobs could be characterized into the very broad categories of external and internal driving forces. External drivers generally fit into two themes: the support of ALs' supervisors and relationships with others across campus. In contrast, many of the driving forces for ALs were internal: enjoying their work, feeling capable, building on prior experience and success, participating in or leading institutional improvement, and being connected with and involved in a broad range of institutional initiatives.

Reporting Lines. Almost all respondents report to the chief executive officer (CEO) or to the chief academic officer (CAO). Of course, the support of the CEO is crucial to an AL's success. Areas of support noted by those interviewed include approving budget requests for accreditation-related activities; sending the AL to the annual SACS meeting and other events; providing general encouragement and verbal support within the institution; and serving as a

resource when the AL encounters challenges obtaining information for or meeting accreditation requirements.

I discussed with some interviewees whether they had to ask for CEO-level support when needed, or if the CEO was more proactive, serving as a driving force. Respondents indicated CEO involvement always was based on situational circumstances. It was clear, however, that certain liaisons with whom I spoke had a very solid level of confidence their CEO would support them in any way necessary. Further, some knew that the CEO would support their efforts even without knowing the details of a situation.

I'm sure your findings indicated that people frequently have difficulty getting others on campus to provide requested information. We have had faculty members and department chairs and directors who would call the president and say, "this person is in my office and won't leave," and the president's response was "well you better give her what she wants then." I have the ideal environment for SACS liaison because I know that no matter what I do, if it's in the best interest of continuous quality improvement at my institution, my president will back me up hands down (Case 105).

On the other hand, sometimes executive support is evident, but not as active as might be ideal; for example, one interviewee responded that the CEO shows support by "not undermining" activities or efforts required for accreditation.

When I spoke with ALs who reported to the CAO, I most often pointed out SACS' recommendation that the AL report to the CEO, then asked whether they thought the CEO or CAO would provide more effective support to the liaison role. Many actually thought the CAO was more valuable because of the direct line of authority with the faculty and deans. One respondent struggled with an answer to the question but ultimately decided the CAO would be most effective since the CEO would probably take a more general approach, while the CAO would be more likely to take an operational, or guiding, approach in any accreditation-related

planning, process, or problem resolution. The CAO position is exemplified through the following two examples.

It wasn't like I was standing out there on my own. If I really needed somebody to play the bad guy he came in and did some of that. So I think if there hadn't been the support of the president and there hadn't been more importantly that [other senior administrator] coming in behind and saying you guys really have to do this it wouldn't have, not all of it would have gotten done . . . what I had been saying all along and had been shouting from the roof tops and saying this is what we're going to need to do and people had been kind of going, "yeah, yeah, yeah, I think you're over reacting," he came in and he said, "no she's not," and they kind of all looked at him and they went, "Oh, really?" And then everybody starting running around and doing what I needed them to do. But you know it was like, if you had listened to me six months ago, we wouldn't all be running around right now. But he reinforced what I had been saying and kind of made people listen. (Case 126)

Our president and provost both work very well in tandem . . . I think one of the best reasons that I can point out that working with the provost directly is the faculty are so key and to have her support and I can't say that this would be true for every provost everywhere. All I can say is from our perspective at this institution she has a great rapport with the faculty, as does the president. But she still has more direct interactions with them as the chief academic officer. I think that that has opened the door to faculty in a way that perhaps wouldn't if I was coming from the president's office. I think they see it more as a, they might, I mean I can't speak for them, however, from my perspective, it seems like they see it more as coming from an academic perspective. To me, I think that in almost any instance the faculty of an institution are gonna play a vital role in your whole, your accreditation and how you respond to the standards and how you meet those standards. Therefore, I think that it's worked well I would say for me to report to the provost and that has given me an entree directly to the faculty in meeting these and working through the SACS standards and being prepared for reaffirmation (Case 85).

Respondents pointed out a major factor in a CEO's responsibilities is to handle external relations. Often, this means the CEO is not on campus, not available, or not directly involved in what is happening on campus. When both the CAO and CEO are involved in accreditation, ALs such as Case 85 above believed they knew more about strategic planning and were more connected with the academic enterprise than did their peers who did not have any formal reporting authority with the CAO.

Relationships/Communication. . . . having the support of the president and provost was obviously very key but I also got to come in immediately and start working with a broad spectrum of the faculty and administrators and students. As I said earlier, the more and more people we bring into the fold that makes it easier and easier to do (Case 85).

It was very clear that positive relationships were a common driving force in ALs' ability and success in fulfilling their responsibilities. Informal communications, persuasion, institutional history, and shared experiences were all elements of conversations comprising this theme. Relationships also were the basis for facilitating communication with ALs. There were two main components to conversations in this area: ALs' inclusion on committees and in conversations that likely would have implications for accreditation; and, the tendency for people across campus to ask ALs a lot of questions.

There's also the general conscientiousness, I guess, on the part of a variety of different stakeholders at this school. They know things that could impact accreditation and they usually ask me about them. So they have a lot of questions and faculty credentials that come to me before that process even starts sometimes or in the very early phase. I have a lot of questions from like, financial aid and some other areas that they ask me, you know, basically I'm kept in the loop with a number of different diverse areas. So, I think that really the best way I'm supported in being able to support the institution is that the institution is pretty conscientious (Case 20).

Respondents emphasized the importance of informal communication, noting the AL is responsible for very high-level objectives and accomplishments, as well as a great deal of "peripheral stuff," details that must be given attention in order to justify or support the "policy-level stuff." This respondent's articulation of the reality of the AL epitomized the experience of most of those interviewed. This AL noted that the person who serves in the role must have a very clear balance between tasks and relationships—on the one hand, an AL has to get a task achieved; on the other hand, without strong and positive relationships with colleagues in all areas of the campus, those colleagues will be much less likely to provide what is needed for

accreditation. “I don’t think anyone who is knowledgeable can do the job of the liaison officer successfully. You know, we have to learn how to do it right, and relationships are a big part of that” (Case 80).

So whatever I do or say, it’s mostly people comply because they like me and they know I’m really invested and they know that I’m just trying to do the best for the institution. They trust me; they believe I’m doing what I have to and then they’ll cooperate because most people are basically good and they want what is best (Case 38).

Almost every AL interviewed communicated the importance of being connected to a broad range of academic and operational areas on campus. Relationships and knowing what was happening across the institution were driving forces because as most AL’s said in one way or another, everything she/he does involves SACS.

I kind of feel like I have my fingers in everybody’s pot. I know a lot about what’s going on a lot of different places. I get to see what everybody does and I get to share a lot of information . . . I have fingers in everything from facilities and maintenance to, you know, radiation technology, to visual arts, whatever, because it’s all over the place. And, and I’m probably the only one at this institution whose job it is to connect the dots between all those different assessment areas where applicable and when applicable. Other than the president, and the president has more external, you know, things to do than I do certainly. Obviously the provost is focused on academic affairs, all the other divisions, you know, vice presidents are focused on their areas. In my position, I have to be focused on everybody’s area, at least at some level, and so what I enjoy the most is bringing different people together to find unique ways of looking at things, unique solutions and so on. So that I find really exciting and that changes all the time. It’s a really good position in that regard (Case 20).

Moreover, the liaisons seemed to think they needed to know something about the whole institution in order to be effective. “I find myself being an ex officio on every major committee and I find myself being part of conversations, so many conversations around the college. I know more about the college than I probably want to know, and that is interesting” (Case 38). One of the ways ALs learn about the institution is through the questions they are asked. As people across campus become more conscientious about accreditation, they tend to ask more questions.

This tendency is part of the learning process in any area. For ALs, this means they develop relationships and gain insight about institutional activities in many areas. Among those identified were curriculum, new programs, enrollment management, facilities and maintenance, financial aid, development/advancement, athletics, governance, marketing, budget, student services, and libraries, among others.

Positive Impact on the Institution. I love the process of reaffirmation. I love the process of accreditation, self-study, and peer review. I think it's a wonderful process. I've been involved with the Commission [for a long time]. This is something that I truly love and find very interesting and I never am bored with it – maybe not never, never, but most of the time I am not bored with this work at all. It doesn't get old (Case 26).

ALs interviewed all believed they added value to their institution, both through what they do in their roles promoting institutional improvement across their colleges and universities, and through what they do individually to have a positive impact based on their professional qualifications and personal commitment.

One theme related to institutional improvement that arose during the interviews was the belief that accreditation activities are key to continuous improvement across the board. Most ALs think the *Principles of Accreditation*, as well as the fundamental reasons they were developed and passed by SACS' membership “represent a lot of decisions, a lot of hard work, a lot of complex interaction among faculty, students and other administrators . . . to ultimately get students to learn and that's, you know, really what it comes down to is having an impact on student learning” (Case 38).

Liaisons noted their appreciation for the tendency for accreditation processes to serve as the impetus for ensuring the quality and integrity of all programs. Further, interviewees noted the advantage of being able to approach SACS activities and reporting requirements within the context of their individual institutional missions, programming, and values. Without exception,

respondents indicated they are able to build upon the successes of their communities as well as enhance areas where room for improvement might be more apparent. In other words, the concept of continuous improvement applies in all situations—even if goals are being met, generally there are areas where some enhancement could be implemented.

This mindset aligns with trends in public perceptions of higher education as described by one interviewee below:

I think we're in an era of higher education where we have to be accountable to the public. Whether you're a public or a private institution, there are people out there who are footing the bills and there is so much importance for higher education in the future of our country, of our region. Therefore, I really think that accreditation is a big key component of that, and I certainly would hope that we continue to have a system of accreditation and not some forced accountability from say, the federal government, where we all do this cookie cutter same thing. I think that accreditation and the way it's done right now is much more effective than I think anything that would come down the pike from a federal mandate would be. So I think that this is exciting, and I enjoy being a part of it and look forward to continuing that (Case 85).

It is no secret that postsecondary education increasingly is called upon to provide evidence the enterprise is making a valuable difference for students and their communities. A general sense among professionals in higher education, especially administrators with responsibility directly associated to accreditation, is that regional accrediting agencies are trying to address proactively concerns that might be imminent from the federal government.

. . . I know that SACS is trying to keep the feds at bay in part by showing that they, as an accrediting agency, can provide the information, the results, the outcomes, the data they think the feds would require of us if they were doing a No Child Left Behind approach for higher education (Case 51).

People working in colleges and universities have become more appreciative of the return on investment concept as it relates to higher education. Tuition and fees escalate, and it is understandable for students, their families, and taxpayers to have expectations for meaningful, measurable results.

Professional Experience/Personal Satisfaction. Over 90% of ALs would continue in their positions if given the choice at the time of this study. Most of those interviewed also found both professional and personal satisfaction in their role. There were several themes in reasons for job satisfaction; among these themes were the fit between their experience/skills and those required to excel in the role, involvement in a broad range of institutional areas, ongoing learning, feeling needed in the organization, and playing a notable role in the continuous improvement of their respective institutions.

Liaisons must have a grasp of many academic and operational areas, as well as expertise in strategic planning, assessment, institutional research, academic affairs, and reporting. One respondent noted how lucky she was to have a career that “really, really” matched her skills. Another said everything he had done prior in his career had prepared him for the role. Several ALs who were interviewed believed their success in the role over time afforded them a level of credibility that served as a driving force for their continued ability to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

I asked one interviewee why he thought he had been so successful. He responded, “Well, a thick skin. In addition, long years of experience . . . So I’ve been at it a long time, which I think gives a person I should say a bit of perspective, a bit of tolerance, a little bit of wisdom” (Case 85). He went on to say:

I feel like once you’ve been involved in things for so many years you develop a feel for how it should go and how to help people understand more of the importance of it and what’s going on and why and also just not only accreditation but in many other instances how to work with people across departmental and unit lines and whatever and across faculty staff and that kind of thing (Case 85).

The liaisons with whom I spoke took a great deal of pride in their ability and willingness to serve in a challenging role that was often perceived as undesirable among their colleagues.

One AL expressed his position as follows:

Well, let's see. I don't want to be cynical here and say nobody else wants to do it . . . but, I mean, why not? I have been doing it long enough to know the ropes. I keep learning things for one thing. And I think that's another aspect of a driving force—being able to do stuff most people don't want to do. [would continue as AL] I have no regrets. I like the job. I like my job as a whole. I really like my job. It's a pain in the neck for a lot of people, but I like my job (Case 80).

Another noted “it feeds my sense of see the hill, take the hill” (Case 72).

I asked one interviewee, who had shared with me many challenges since her appointment, why she indicated in her survey that she wanted to continue in her role. She responded:

Because I enjoy it . . . wait, that kind of makes it sound like I'm kind of masochistic! I like being involved in the whole thing at the university level. It is kind of masochistic but I like; I don't know I've just always liked the whole assessment thing in general. I guess it's kind of difficult to explain. I like being involved in it on campus. I like the people that I work with on it. It's like a big puzzle and I love puzzles (Case 126).

Interestingly, a faculty member interviewed who did not want the role when he was appointed had changed his mind over time. He told me his whole perception of accreditation evolved as he learned more about it. He noted he learns “about something different and [he learns] about these new programs in a detailed way, so it keeps [him] kind of on the cutting edge of what's going on, what's new” (Case 29). He said he had to “grow into it to appreciate it; that's what it boils down to.”

Conclusion. Two interviewees characterized the depth of professional and personal satisfaction experienced by most ALs.

I like what I'm getting out of it, I mean I'm an IR person by experience and I like the opportunity to interact with other people on campus. I like the opportunity to

dig a little bit deeper. I like the opportunity to learn new things in a new field. And then, I feel like by doing this I have made just an enormous difference at my campus. And that's why we all are here (Case 105).

The community liaison role is kind of like being the voice of conscience or integrity for the institution, and it is challenging people and committees and the institution as a whole to always be making good decisions, data-based decisions. And I love that because that's why I did this is for continuous improvement; for the idea that I can help the institution to improve how they operate, how they make decisions and better the institution for students and that's wonderful. So I need all of that. I think that's a great role for that (Case 38).

"It's just some people choose to be negative about it and some of us don't. You've got to have a sense of humor—that'll get you through as well" (Case 51).

Blocking Forces

Environmental challenges included faculty resistance and/or lack of appreciation for accreditation; ALs having responsibility without appropriate authority; not being informed of institutional information pertinent to accreditation and potential substantive changes; changes in or different interpretations of SACS' principles and standards; emergent technological requirements; and, excessive work requirements without sufficient resources.

Resistance/Lack of Appreciation for Accreditation. Most ALs noted resistance as a major blocking force in terms of their ability to carry out their responsibilities. Resistance from faculty stemmed from an array of perceived sources, but often respondents believed a lack of respect, or appreciation, for accreditation, was at the heart of the matter. Very closely related to this line of thinking were challenges ALs encountered as leaders in shifting institutional culture, especially in academic areas, to include meaningful integration of assessment.

As demonstrated with the quote below, faculty attitudes pervaded interview conversations about resistance to accreditation.

People don't know how to write syllabi. People don't know a behavioral objective from a hole in the wall. People who don't think that assessment is important. I

would say that faculty members who come into a teaching institution as we are don't do so well prepared to think in terms of outcomes and assessment. They kind of do it informally, intuitively, and they do it in ways that make sense to them but maybe not to others. And so those are blocking forces and you simply have to keep working at having an institutional ethos that says, 'Well, when you're here and you're teaching courses and you're being evaluated. You need to include this outcomes assessment orientation (Case 51).

At the same time, ALs noted progress over time. A number of interviewees noted faculty have been willing to be coaxed into learning about assessment and many faculty really try to do it. One respondent who was a faculty member, and still considers himself to be faculty rather than administration, realizes the AL role results in a situation whereby he is "less than popular" with other faculty sometimes. He noted he has a bigger challenge working with faculty who are in arts and sciences programs, as compared to faculty who are in professional disciplines, who are more acculturated to and prepared for meeting requirements of accrediting agencies. This particular AL was in a non-professional program, so was speaking from his own perspective as a faculty member, as well as from his experience with colleagues in his discipline: "We don't think in terms of proving that our students have learned something. They're supposed to prove to us that they can pass our tests. Those kinds of things are not effective for an assessment program" (Case 51).

At least half of the ALs interviewed made reference to the irony of faculty, who are generally characterized as researchers, not knowing how to determine whether what they are teaching results in their intended student learning outcomes.

It's not because we're making your lives miserable, okay, because this is what we have to do to assure ourselves that we are doing what we say we are doing. We have a philosophy in general education; we claim our students are going to come out with these outcomes. We have to demonstrate it . . . and it is no different than asking the students for a term paper. You say you're studying, you say you're learning; I want you to write a term paper to give me evidence that that in fact is happening. It's no different. Yeah. If we're not prepared to give evidence with some periodicity or practically at any time; if we're doing what we say we are

doing, then hello, you know, who are we? This is my message to the faculty on occasions where it makes sense to say that (Case 72).

Simply stated, most people on campuses are not excited about assessment. As one respondent noted, his colleagues “rely heavily on the accreditation liaison here to kind of worry about accreditation and trying to change their mindset on that has been a challenge. I don’t think that’s unique” (Case 116). Building on that theme, another interviewee pointed out people “would rather you just stamp it and tell them how to handle it, and we’ve done that for [many] years” (Case 24). This can be stressful for liaisons because they are in a position of a great deal of power and responsibility, usually without authority to do what they need to do.

Achieving support from faculty and administrators institution-wide undoubtedly involves AL persuasion and persistence. Sometimes the persuasion necessitates what might be considered negative persuasion—pointing out harmful consequences of not meeting requirements. Persuasion by definition involves influencing change. Moving toward a compliance review and reporting deadline often creates an external pressure that is not usually organic within a college or university; this makes it challenging to maintain interest and momentum, especially with assessment of educational programs, administrative support services, academic support services, research, and community service—especially after the requirements have been met for reaffirmation. The comments of one participant represent well those of several others:

. . .even though we did have that sense of urgency and everybody was on board, once you get away from your reaffirmation, the pressure of getting everything done . . . and you get your campus through it and your decisions by the Commission back, you know, it does tend to be one of those things that’s not quite as urgent for people (Case 85).

The goal, as one liaison articulated, is “getting people to see quality improvement as something that should be endemic throughout the university rather than a report that has to be filled out and turned in” (Case 105). Another noted, “. . . the biggest blocking force is probably

just overall weariness on the part of the faculty and the administrators. They're so tired from everything, it was such a big build up to get to the reaffirmation and the site visit and everything else that they just expect time off" (Case 126).

Overcoming resistance to accreditation processes was a universal blocking force among the ALs I interviewed. Almost every one, however, noted they were making progress with some groups more than others. "The challenge there is to get that next person and then that next person, you know, and picking up more and more buy-in across the campus as opposed to just pockets of people who are supportive of the process" (Case 85). Again, changing an institution's culture to be reliant on assessment and committed to continuous improvement in all areas does necessitate a level of respect for the premises of postsecondary accreditation.

Not Knowing What's Going On. Accreditation liaisons are responsible for ensuring five and 10 year comprehensive reporting requirements are met for the Commission, but they are also responsible for ensuring the Commission is aware of, and approves if warranted, many institutional changes. These changes can occur at any time and range from something as major as a change in governance structure to as minor as a program being offered at a location a block from the main campus. Sometimes a letter of notification is sufficient to meet SACS requirements. The more substantive the change, however, the more rigorous the notification, reporting, review, and approval process.

The AL is unable to meet the responsibilities of the role and, therefore, keep the institution in SACS policy compliance if she/he is unaware of strategic planning academic or operational changes, or any number of caveats stipulated in the policy statement. Below is a list of several direct quotes from ALs I interviewed. These statements represent both the challenge

and the level of concern experienced by professionals who are unable to fulfill their responsibilities if they do not have the information they need.

We have a very big organization. One thing that's really difficult as things emerge, is finding out when they're emerging if a sufficient amount of time in advance to be able to notify SACS in a timely manner. We have a very widespread use of BlackBoard and so it becomes very easy for part of the class materials to become BlackBoard and part of the class to be face-to-face. And maybe they start meeting every semester face-to-face in addition to what's on BlackBoard and then they say, "Oh, maybe we can go to every other week" or something like that. We try to track that the best we can. There's really nothing in their scheduling system that will tell us that definitively, especially in advance. We're working closer with the registrar to be sure that the folks in the academic departments are actually coding the courses accurately. We talk to a lot of people. We did some sampling and asked particular questions. If we feel like we don't have a handle on it we might do what would be the equivalent of a physical inventory if we were running a manufacturing company. You know, sample around and say, "Okay how is this," you know, talk to a faculty member how are your outcomes in this course? And that takes a lot of leg work (Case 24).

But I don't know whether I need to or not because I don't know institutional-wide planning and decision making unless I just happen to hear of it. In other words, I'm not in a direct communication channel at the institutional level. So that is a frustration. I just feel like I need a better communication network with what's going on at the institution so I can say, "Hey, that's a substantive change. We need to notify SACS." I could say, "Hey that change may not be in the line of what is expected in this particular comprehensive standard." I don't have any way of doing that (Case 26).

And yet, sometimes things, you know, how do you as an accreditation liaison stay in touch with everything going on, on your campus to make certain you're not tripping the substantive change wire. Did it inadvertently trip and you don't know about it until after the fact. Particularly as institutions move to more distance learning . . . (Case 72).

So if [the president] is not here . . . a lot of times his staff forgets that I'm here. The biggest challenge that I have is . . . being a part of academic affairs but a little bit removed from the colleges. It's challenging because I have to remind them that there's a lot that happens in the academic programs that I need to know about . . . there are things that they do that we . . . must track, and we must notify SACS about and there are reasons for that . . . They were very used to not really having to monitor a lot of things and it's very hard to change that culture (Case 126).

. . . as we're moving programs on-line, you have to monitor to what extent a program is on-line and notify about that. Where we're looking at taking programs

out to other locations, where you have to monitor the extent to which you're offering a program at another location. Just things like that. We've always been very entrepreneurial here and they encourage that, but you also have to monitor that. They haven't gotten to that point yet in their thinking. They think, well, "This really isn't a substantive change for me, it's not a substantive change for my program, because I've always been teaching this class and the fact that I'm changing the way I'm teaching it now, I haven't really changed the content, so I don't see why I should have to tell anybody about it." And so they don't tell me and I don't find out about it until later and so, even though we've gone through a number of training sessions where we've tried to teach them what it is that they need to be looking for, department chairs, deans, the faculty themselves, are still not quite in that mode where they realize that they need to let me know what's going on, and that they need to maybe tell me something, tell somebody something, tell somebody what they're doing (Case 126).

Related to a lack of information and, perhaps more precarious, are situations wherein ALs are not included in conversations that might relate to substantive changes. As evidenced by the statements above, often the people effecting change are unaware of the impact to accreditation requirements. If an AL is included in communications deliberately and strategically, she/he can add value by ensuring SACS policies and procedures are addressed appropriately right from the beginning of an initiative.

Responsibility Without Authority. The quantitative survey included questions about whether ALs had responsibilities in areas in which they did not have decision-making authority. I discussed with interviewees their responses to these questions.

One AL with whom I spoke said, "I think there's a lot of responsibility that's been in this position and a lot of accountability; but in many cases, on many campuses, I'm betting there's not much authority" (Case 72). When I told her most ALs who responded to the survey indicated they did have the authority needed to carry out their responsibilities, she stated, "Really: They must be selecting more senior accreditation liaisons. How do they get people on their campuses to listen to them? They don't listen to me" (Case 72). I found this comment curious, because this particular liaison had served nearly 30 years at her institution.

A couple of themes emerged in the conversations about responsibility without authority: ensuring faculty credentials meet SACS requirements; and ALs feeling as if they would be held accountable for problems that occurred with the Commission, even if they were not in a position to have prevented those problems. In an effort to avoid such situations, ALs often rely on their persuasive skills and relationships to try to fulfill responsibilities that fall within someone else's formal purview.

You know, I'm not the provost and in addition to that, I'm not a tenured - somebody who came up through a tenured faculty position. Perhaps it would be different if I was. Chances are it wouldn't be though. But dealing with making sure that everyone that is hired meets the criteria, meets the standards of our own faculty credentials and, if there is an exception, that is a legitimate exception, not just something that somebody wrote up, you know, doesn't hold what we consider enough water to be acceptable. You know, we've gotten all kinds of push back and again, this becomes heightened obviously during the reaffirmation because you're doing a complete inventory of all your faculty rather than reviewing the faculty as they're being hired and that's basically the process that we've done in the past. And you know, we obviously - most everybody finds a few people that might not exactly meet what we say our standards are (Case 24).

In some situations, however, liaisons did not believe they had the relationships and/or reporting lines they believed were necessary to fulfill the responsibilities the Commission expects of them. The two interviews below illustrated these circumstances.

While I think we are probably in compliance, I'm not sure we'll be in compliance if expectations for program assessment continue to increase over time like I feel like they're doing. I said, "I'm not sure that the process we have now is going to be good when we submit our Fifth-Year Interim Report." I think we need to make these changes and that's where my suggestion stopped and I don't have any authority to go beyond him or anything and, you know, I'm still debating in my mind . . . whether I need to go knock on the president's door . . . and since we are in good shape . . . because he has someone who knows the ins and outs of the process They're comfortable, but I'm not, because I feel like, if we had some sort of violation of substantive changes, they would look at me and say, "Why did you allow that to happen," and yet, I may have not known that we were making that change (Case 26).

Right, I mean, it's normal you're going to feel responsible for making sure that the institution is in compliance and I'll be doing anything I can to make sure that

it comes in compliance and stays in compliance but in reality I have no authority . . . I don't sit on the senior management team so I don't even have a voice at that table. I am on constant committees all over the campus including strategic planning and all kinds of – usually in an ex officio capacity so that is good. I can bring up things everywhere but in terms of actually implementing anything and I'm not over faculty and whenever – I see myself as a consultant really, you know, that's who I am. I'm an internal consultant so as a consultant they have to decide whether the advice you're giving them is good or not and you can work with them on it. However, you have no supervisory role over anybody. If their supervisors are not supporting what you're saying or not providing the support they need in their role there then it makes it really hard (Case 38).

Accreditation liaisons are included in communications between their institutions and the Commission. It is essential for ALs to receive important notifications from SACS and to have direct access to the SACS staff member assigned to their college or university. Indeed, a formidable blocking force is a situation such as the one described below, in which this interviewee initially held her role as an unofficial liaison.

The provost was my big stumbling block. He was – he wanted very much to be the SACS liaison. And to be the one contact with SACS, the face of SACS on campus. But he didn't put the hours and the effort in during the reaffirmation and he, if I had questions that needed to go to SACS he wouldn't send them, he wouldn't contact our liaison at SACS and I would have to ask the same questions over and over and over again. Because we weren't allowed to contact our [SACS staff member], only he was. So it was just, it was a nightmare (Case 126).

At the time of the interview, this study participant had been appointed as the official AL at her institution. She told me that appointment made all the difference in her ability to fulfill her responsibilities for the college and for the Commission.

Changes in or Different Interpretations of Principles. As accountability and accreditation gain more attention among stakeholder groups, the foci on performance standards and transparency increase. A theme that emerged among interviewees was the challenge of not only keeping up with formal changes in accreditation requirements but also in the evolution of the interpretation of those requirements. In other words, as people in higher education become

more sophisticated with accountability and accreditation, the way they interpret accreditation standards becomes informally elevated. The following comments made by study participants support this finding:

- I think actually the biggest challenge is keeping up with the changes, you know, as the standards – I’m not talking about like the formal changes . . .
- I think one of the biggest blocking forces, or challenges, I guess challenges because it’s more external, is the ever moving interpretation of SACS standards.
- Of course, the bar is raised now. You really have to have documented improvements in virtually all of your programs both academic and administrative now to get through clean on a review.
- SACS expectations have a way of always creeping up. You know, you may have a written standard that says one thing but over a period of time, expectations from review committees sort of get stronger and they expect a little more, and a little bit more, and a little bit more, just like everything else we do in higher-education, you know.
- Well, one of them of course as you know, one of the great transformations in accreditation has been from input to output. That is to say, instead of evaluating colleges in terms of how many books they’ve got in their library, they what to look at what the actual outcomes are; and to do that you have to have a sufficient and appropriate and valid assessment measures. I find that one of the more challenging aspects of accreditation is relatively recent fixation might be too hard a word but focus by accrediting agencies like SACS on proving that you do what you say you do, which is what assessment is. It is more formalistic, bureaucratic, assessment driven, outcome obsessed than was the case when I first started this, which makes it more difficult, more challenging; but it’s inevitable.
- With faculty specifically and even with some of the administrators that have been here for a while. They still don’t understand the changes that have happened in SACS where you have to credential faculty to every course.

Another closely related blocking force is the fact that the *Principles of Accreditation*, as well as the way in which those requirements are addressed, are open to interpretation. The comments below, from interviewees, demonstrate a trend in this particular challenge encountered as ALs fulfill their responsibilities:

- [My boss] . . . and I don’t necessarily see the SACS process in the same way . . . she really does see it as more, we have to do this, we have to make sure we’re in

compliance, and I see it as, you know, that SACS is a good thing at its outset and in the end and, you know, keeps us improving

- Principles are principles. It's not a cookbook and so you – I mean, to some extent they're open to interpretation, you know . . .
- . . . we had some very lively conversations about faculty credentials when we were doing our compliance certification and the focused report . . . about what constituted a credential.

Principles changing formally or through evolving interpretations is a blocking force for accreditation liaisons and others in their institutions who do not participate in SACS events, serve on peer review committees, and/or consistently read through the agency's website.

Too Much Work/Too Few Resources. Accreditation liaisons, like most other people in higher education, work hard. They put in long hours, deal with sometimes conflicting tight time lines, are accountable to a number of stakeholders, and understand they are likely to realize little relief in the short-term as resources for postsecondary education continue to diminish over time. Too much work and too few resources were blocking forces noted by several of the ALs I interviewed.

The volume of work, in addition to the broad scope of work discussed earlier, was a theme in the qualitative findings. In discussing her professional charge, one AL stated, "There's too much of it. Something I would have said when I came [many] years ago, all the way up to the present. I'm not sure that I can physically sustain the amount of effort that it takes" (Case 24). A faculty member referred to it as "a huge job" (Case 29), and a CAO noted "the physical hours, the labor hours that we put in—it's beyond a lot of people's imagination" (Case 80).

. . . what I need is one or two additional people in my office. And there's no chance of that happening. . . . we need more people. We need more people so that we can have more people dedicated to doing stronger assessment, monitoring assessment, enforcing assessment, really leading that process in each of the colleges. There's not enough across the board. Some colleges are much more in tune with that than others out of necessity you know. But, but really what we need as a whole, we need the budget to be able to hire more faculty so that some

faculty can get the release time they need to support these larger institutional efforts (Case 20).

Of all of the ALs who responded, none had only SACS responsibilities as their entire role within their college or university. Many are responsible for academic affairs, assessment across all units, institutional research, and a whole host of other areas.

I [am] the primary person for institutionalized assessments. All the programs assess in addition to any disciplinary outcomes at least three university-wide outcomes. I collect that, monitor that. General education outcomes are all assessed in a rather significant number of courses. I collect that and try to monitor that. That's one area that's very difficult to maintain because it's probably bigger than it needs to be or should be and it's just harder to keep up. [This state] requires a lot of general education outcomes and when you start breaking them down into specific knowledge or skills it gets to be enormous (Case 20).

One element of conversations with a number of interviewees related to excessive workloads and modest resources: many ALs are appointed to the role with no reduction in their preexisting responsibilities. An administrator who likes the job did share with me one of the things she likes least is the fact that the AL appointment was made with no adjustment to her other work load; then, she went on to say that this makes the job “a little less pleasant” than it really needs to be. Toward the other end of the continuum, a senior faculty member expressed his frustration with being appointed as his institution's AL, indicating, “I'm spending my life doing this. Somebody on the faculty has to do it, but do I enjoy it? No. It pulls you away from teaching and it pulls you away from doing any research” (Case 116).

Technology. A blocking force for a few liaisons was the ever-increasing complexity of documenting compliance with SACSCOC standards and doing so through electronic means. If one were to go back in time 10 years, processes for submitting reports, providing supporting documentation, and reviewing institutional compliance was much different. Most, if not all, of these processes were done through paper means. Today, reaffirmation involves a great deal of

technology. Most reports are submitted in paper format and through electronic media, including elaborate websites, flash drives, videos, and CD-ROMs. Quotes from two interviewees in particular stood out as very rich explanations of the challenges faced by ALs:

I have to say this [reaffirmation] has been much harder; the compliance certification is much harder. You have to get it on-line. You have to make available electronically. You're not talking to people. You're sending it to Atlanta to people who have never met you and all they know is what's on paper or what's on the screen that's a much more labor-intensive job. . . . this offsite thing has made it a major editing job. We have to make it available on our website. That's its own challenge. However, it has created a major industry of various expensive forms of software and others just to try to keep up with that and that is a challenge. Now we're turning a room full of documents and, you know, footnoting each of those standards. All you have to do is look at one of these websites, a thumb drive from a school that really took it seriously, there's a hell of a lot of work in that. It is a lot more than just, you know, preparing a document and there's a whole industry creating websites. Think about the human hours of putting that together, wherein the old days, you know, we had a room full of documents but we didn't have to have a document next to every one of those standards and every paragraph in the chapter (Case 116).

. . . in some cases, the technology almost becomes the inhibitor, you know, inhibits the behavior because it's seen as – it becomes the marker of the project and they hate the technology for whatever reason. So that actually becomes an obstruction to, I guess if you want to go back to blocking forces in some cases making the reporting too technical or having a system, particularly a vendor provided system for reporting actually inhibits in some cases the ability to collect good data and stay in compliance . . . (Case 20).

Trying to get a better understanding of the root of the challenge, I followed up by asking this participant how he gets people across campus involved in assessment and tracking outcomes. He responded:

Other than sort of friendly, frequent friendly hounding, I'm not really sure to be honest. Everybody will give you technical solutions for that. But nobody will give you human behavioral solutions to that because there isn't one. You know, you almost don't need the technology because you still have to have the people go in and do it. The issues are all the problems are all human based or all behavioral based. They're all communication within the institution and those are all the concerns and issues we have to deal with, then the technology is like so what (Case 20).

Other Qualitative Results

The interview question about blocking forces naturally led to conversations about strategies study participants had used to overcome some of the challenges they faced over time and what they thought it would take to overcome contemporary blocking forces. Strategies employed that reduced challenges included using persuasion and focusing on the greater good of the institution; putting systems in place for ensuring accreditation requirements are met and documented; training others in the institution; building internal capacity around assessment; relying on good communication and teamwork; engaging the support of others with more authority; and, increasing professional development and networks for ALs.

Liaisons who felt successful indicated they relied heavily upon their ability to employ persuasive techniques with their colleagues, most often appealing to their sense of contributing to the greater good of their institutions. I asked one AL whether he ever felt he was pushing or pulling faculty or other administrators along the compliance path. His response was, “of course, that’s part of the job . . . [it’s] an important thing to do and you need to be vigilant consistently on it” (Case 105). Another noted she finds “some of it is good will, because they know that I want to do this for the right reasons. I don’t tell them to do reports just for the sake of reports” (Case 38).

A theme among comments related to persuasion was the extent to which learning was a supporting force. In other words, the more people learned about the merits of accreditation, the more willing they were to engage in activities in support of compliance. A liaison who had been a full-time faculty member before his AL appointment completely changed his own mind about accreditation. He now persuades others at his institution to partner with him toward meeting reporting requirements, but, more importantly, toward establishing a culture of continuous

improvement. He noted, “. . . all these rules and criteria and so forth, there’s good reason for them. And they make the school a better school. So, that’s kind of what I preach that we’re going to be better off for all of it” (Case 29). I asked him what he thought attributed to the change in his own mindset about accreditation, and he replied it had everything to do with learning about the premises upon which accreditation was originally established and continues to thrive.

Other ALs used persuasion strategies such as the following: promoting and building on small successes over time; tailoring assessment conversations and practices to individual units to ensure meaningful alignment; finding and utilizing ambassadors on campus to help communicate a positive message about accreditation; building internal capacity and training faculty; linking institutional assessment and accreditation processes with those of various academic disciplines; and, celebrating successes generated through strong assessment outcomes. Some very specific strategies for improving institutional participation in and support for accreditation, thereby reducing blocking forces, were shared by ALs with whom I spoke (see Appendix 10).

I’m saying a lot; but, what I’m really saying, encapsulated, is I think that you make assessment work not just by having a big assessment office someplace. Instead you get that infused in faculty and departments and have a diversified approach You add all things up and it gives you a pretty, not only diversified, but healthy approach toward assessment that becomes endemic to the academic enterprise; not something just imposed from outside and above (Case 51).

Several interviewees noted they preferred not to use SACSCOC requirements as the basis for persuasion because they thought doing so sent a more negative than positive message. They chose instead to focus on internal reasons for compliance and found this strategy to have a more positive impact than simply informing their colleagues they had to do something because of externally imposed stipulations. Finally, referring problematic situations to a higher authority was a strategy used by ALs as a last resort for meeting the requirements of their liaison role.

Unexpected Findings

Most of the interviews included short conversations about topics related to the AL role but not necessarily aligned with one of the specific predetermined questions. Themes arising out of these tangential discussions included ALs being hired relatively close to an institution's reaffirmation time line, ALs' signatures on documents submitted to SACS, ALs' concern about a succession plan for their role, and job responsibilities ALs have in addition to those related to SACSCOC.

New at Reaffirmation Time. Seven of the 12 interviewees commented on the time line of their appointment to the AL role, noting they had assumed their positions with little time to spare prior to institutional reaffirmation of accreditation. Newly appointed liaisons experienced the challenges of leading the reaffirmation process, in addition to those associated with learning a new job. Some had their challenges compounded by the fact they were new to their institution, other senior administrators were new to the institution, or both. Selected comments below illustrate their experiences:

I was actually hired right after reaffirmation. The person, actually the person prior to me had been hired [closely] prior to reaffirmation when they started doing their self-study and all that stuff and it kind of just drove her into the ground. And so she just wanted nothing more to do with it. So I came in right after that. . . . having a long history at the institution, having a reputation for effectiveness certainly doesn't hurt. Now I guess some people hire folks from other institutions to do this. So I think they'd have to be well connected, pretty fast in order to really pull the whole thing off because there's so much institutional history with the compliance certification; drawing on the past and really understanding how things work. That becomes really important to be able to do the job. (Case 24)

I was appointed SACSCOC liaison three months before our compliance certification was due. And it just about killed me dead literally. (Case 105)

Well, I think I came to [this institution] when we were less than a year away from having to submit our compliance certification report. While a little bit of work had been done, there was not a lot done. . . . Now I'm not saying that I would necessarily want to relive that year and a half or so but it was, you know, it really

was something that was rewarding from a professional standpoint to know that we could pull everything together in an acceptable way and something that was positive for the institution. It was not just because of SACSCOC, but because it brought some focus to some things for us on the campus also. So, I found that part of it very fulfilling, professionally. (Case 85)

It's a difficult story because my administration changed right before reaffirmation – so they needed somebody. (Case 38)

[My boss was new and] did not know much about the Southern Association, so she really turned to me on a regular basis during all that time we were in self-study (Case 26)

Signature. All documents sent to SACSCOC must be signed by two individuals on campus—the CEO and the AL. Signatures attest to accuracy and integrity. This accrediting agency policy was problematic for some study participants who noted they had responsibility without authority, did not have the ability to check accuracy, or were not involved in the preparation of documents sent to the Commission.

Sometimes [college] presidents don't read their e-mail and I know the e-mail from the Commission is important so I make sure that someone on the president's staff knows that we have been requested to provide information by a certain date and we have a really good institutional research officer who pulls all the information together and it's presented to me. I sign it and the president signs it and I trust our system. I trust our officer. I really don't have any way of verifying the information that I'm signing is accurate. I just trust our processes. Of course, trust goes a long way. So, I don't really have maybe the ability to go into our systems and look at all the numbers that are written out in terms of financial situation or in terms of enrollment, those sorts of things and I do trust our system and I do trust the people that we have working the system. So in that regard, I do not have any qualms whatsoever in signing any of those documents put in front of me. That's real good because I would not sign those if I had doubts. One of the principles of our Commission is integrity and those of us who participate in this process must have exceptional integrity. And I feel like whenever my name appears somewhere it's got to have exceptional integrity with it. (Case 26)

Several of the liaisons with whom I spoke noted they are often asked by those to whom they report whether the documents are accurate and whether they should sign. This puts an added level of pressure on someone in the AL role, especially if the AL has no

method of becoming certain herself/himself. The sentiment expressed in the statement below demonstrated the general discomfort communicated during the interviews.

Also, occasionally I'll say to people, you know, "When this compliance certification goes down, if people were kind of waffling around a little bit, when the compliance certification goes in it will be the president's signature and my signature." He is going to turn and look at me and go, "Should I sign this?" You know, having asked me that a hundred times along the way and I'll say, "Yeah or no, or whatever." (Case 24)

In contrast, one AL pointed out he does not worry about it very much in the end because the Commission will let them change information later if it is wrong. This was an exception, however.

Worried About Succession Plan. Interview participants shared with the researcher their concern about who would be appointed as AL when they left their institutions. Their apprehension centered on their belief that there were very few, sometimes no, others in the institution who they felt were qualified to take over. One liaison said, "If I didn't have the liaison role, no one would" (Case 38). This liaison then supported her position by pointing out the necessity for the AL to have knowledge and experience in many areas across higher education and to be "really good at all of the skills that you have to have to do the job."

Another AL who had been with his institution for an extended period contemplated some point when he might decide to retire, saying "somebody will have to take it on; I don't know who. I look around and I don't see anybody who wants to do it . . . and I'm probably better at it than anybody else here" (Case 51).

I find myself wanting to sort of do more in the way of educating my senior leadership, my dean, my associate deans, my department chairs about accreditation, so that I'm not the only one on this campus, or one of a handful. Also, my [boss] . . . has been excellent but I'm not sure is one of the handful of people who knows anything, or who cares, or who interprets the principles . . . somebody will still have to write the Fifth-Year Interim Report and handle the next compliance certification. Somebody else needs to know how to do this work. (Case 72)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This research explored the personal and professional characteristics of Accreditation Liaisons in the SACSCOC Region, as well as factors that promote or challenge them in their roles. Toward that end, a sequential mixed methods research design was employed. A survey was administered to collect quantitative data from ALs in Level III, IV, V, and VI institutions with reaffirmation dates between 2008 and 2013, inclusive. A 61% response rate was achieved. The second, qualitative, phase of the study involved confidential telephone interviews with a purposeful sample of ALs who had participated in the first phase. Interviews focused on the driving and blocking forces liaisons face in carrying out their SACSCOC-related job responsibilities. This chapter presents a brief profile of the study participants, followed by a discussion of the meta-inferences drawn from an integrated analysis of the research findings. Each objective is discussed with conclusions and implications for future research if warranted. The chapter ends with the researcher's summative extrapolations.

The researcher utilized an integrative paradigm for inference quality (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009) to make meaning from the combined inferences of each phase of the study. Teddle and Tashakkori (2009) discussed the goal for researchers to focus on the interpretive rigor of mixed-methods research, especially at the meta-inference stage of the process, attending to interpretive consistency, theoretical consistency, interpretive agreement, interpretive distinctiveness, integrative efficacy, and interpretive correspondence. Results from both phases of this study have been integrated, interpreted by more than one researcher, and are consistent across methods.

Lewin's Field Theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. Although Lewin's research was conducted from 1936 to 1951, it remains the foundation of Field Theory.

He theorized that some factors in the environment have a positive, or driving, force on one's motivations and actions, while others will be perceived by an individual to be negative, or blocking forces. Therefore, study of someone's perceptual field is necessary to engage in a force field analysis. Field Theory was the basis for the qualitative and quantitative phases of this dissertation.

SACSCOC Accreditation Liaisons

Objectives one and two of the study were to (1) describe SACS ALs on selected demographic, institutional, and professional characteristics; and (2) understand whether a majority of SACS ALs sought the role originally and continue their aspiration to serve in the role. Research findings resulted in the achievement of these two objectives. A profile of study participants follows.

Respondents' characteristics were obtained in the first phase of the study. Half were female and almost all were Not Hispanic and White. About two-thirds worked at private colleges or universities, across an acceptable distribution of institution level types. Approximately 55% were from what are generally referred to as small institutions, with enrollments of less than 5,000 students.

Professional characteristics of respondents were quite varied. Almost all ALs were senior faculty or senior administrators, which did fit with the Commission's recommendation regarding the status of the person appointed to the role. However, SACS also recommends the AL report directly to an institution's chief executive officer, and only about half of the participants did so. Most participants were not tenured, although most were not in tenure-granting institutions or not in tenure-track positions. Almost all participants had been higher education professionals more than 10 years and two-thirds had spent more than 20 years working in colleges or universities,

about two-thirds had been at their current institution more than 10 years, and about two-thirds had been an AL for four years or less. Academic affairs, including teaching, was the area in which most participants had most experience. Institutional research, academic affairs, assessment, and strategic planning were the areas of responsibility shared by the majority of survey respondents.

All ALs are appointed, ultimately, by an institution's CEO. Interestingly, about 15% of the participants in this study were appointed despite their lack of desire to serve in the role. The researcher did not ask whether those ALs had expressed their reluctance when they were appointed; therefore, this might be an area for further investigation. Almost 10% of respondents indicated they would discontinue serving as their institution's AL if given the choice. Because the percentage who would not continue is lower than the percentage who initially did not want the role, one might conclude some of those who did not want the role initially changed their minds over time. In fact, this was true for one of the interviewees.

Responsibility Without Authority

The third objective of this study was to identify trends in role-critical institutional areas in which liaisons had responsibility but did not have decision-making authority. The researcher's lens was the basis for this area of inquiry, as experience as an AL alluded to this being a fundamental area of challenge, pervading all SACSCOC-related job responsibilities.

Interviews with liaisons did not all include conversations about responsibility without authority; however, several interviewees did note this as a blocking force. Their responses added some understanding to the quantitative data, which indicated over half of the survey participants had responsibility without authority.

Key results in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Because an open-ended comment section also was provided to survey participants who indicated they had responsibilities for which they did not have appropriate authority, qualitative findings from both phases of the research study were abundant. Moreover, they were similar: (a) ALs were responsible for the work of employees who did not report to them; (b) ALs often felt unaware of institutional planning and/or decisions that could have an impact on accreditation; and (c) many relied on persuasion and relationships to accomplish their work.

In the interviews and in their written comments on the surveys, participants communicated frustration at being in a position of responsibility for complete and accurate reporting to SACSCOC, while they did not always have the ability or the knowledge to fulfill the expectation. Their frustration would have been expected, based on the previously presented scholarship of Brumbaugh (1956), who cautioned that authority should be commensurate with the responsibility delegated to someone.

Another area of the quantitative findings fits with this discussion. Every survey respondent noted she/he felt personally accountable for the reports and data submitted to the Commission. In fact, such responsibility is included in the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement. By definition, ALs share responsibility with the CEOs of their institutions for meeting SACS' requirements. Not having the authority, or even fundamental communication and knowledge, pertinent to those requirements is an untenable situation.

This finding supports earlier research in this area (Alstete, 2007; Brumbaugh, 1956; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Administrators simply must have the level of authority needed to carry out their professional responsibilities. Anything less puts them in a position whereby it is unacceptable to hold them accountable.

SACSCOC recommends ALs are senior faculty or administrators who report directly to the CEO of an institution. While most ALs who responded to the survey were senior-level employees, only about half reported to their president or chancellor. One of the strategies interviewees noted they used to affect change, usually as a last resort, was to appeal to a higher authority for support. Typically the higher authority was the CEO or the chief academic officer. This course of action was not favored by the majority of respondents, however. This researcher posits appealing to a higher authority tends to further diminish one's ability to influence, personally and effectively, the actions of others over time. This would be an interesting area for further investigation.

Educational Characteristics and Professional Development of ALs

Objective 4 in this research sought to describe SACSCOC liaisons on selected educational and professional development needs and experiences. The level of education of accreditation liaisons was not a significant issue in the extent to which ALs experience challenges fulfilling their SACSCOC-related responsibilities. Just over 85% of survey respondents had doctoral degrees. Three of 12 interviewed had master's degrees. All three were asked whether they thought their level of education led to any blocking forces as AL. All three responded the same way: They did not think their educational level made any difference. Instead, more important was their experience, effectiveness, and success. They all felt these three factors combined to establish their credibility among their colleagues. As one interviewee stated, "I proved that I really knew what I was talking about, doctorate or no doctorate" (Case 126).

Engagement in professional development activities was found to be essential for institutional accreditation liaisons. Nearly 50 years ago, Blackwell (1966) stressed the

importance of continued professional training for college and university administrators.

Conversations with SACSCOC ALs support the sustained prudence in such advice.

Study participants were asked whether they had professional development in many areas the researcher considered to be pertinent to the AL role: accreditation, strategic planning, institutional assessment, program assessment, institutional effectiveness, institutional research, budget/finance, change management, organizational development, and project management. This question was followed by inquiry as to whether participants needed or wanted more professional development in those same areas, in order to become a more effective AL.

These areas of responsibility fit into two categories: those that were obviously pertinent to the AL role and those that encompass a complex organizational position. I queried several of these areas of professional development (accreditation, institutional assessment, program assessment, institutional effectiveness, and institutional research) based on experience, realizing they were main areas of responsibility for many professionals who hold the AL role. I explored other areas of professional development as a result of my own experience completing the three-step Planning Institute offered by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP).

“SCUP supports integrated planning that is holistic, systemic, and crosses functional and operational boundaries” (SCUP, 2011). Strategic planning, budget/finance, change management, organizational development, and project management are all major components of the Planning Institute and are areas in which additional professional development have been very beneficial for the researcher, as an AL herself, over the last three years.

The results of the study were interesting in that most liaisons had had professional training in the areas most obviously related to the AL role, and they still indicated they felt they wanted or needed additional development in order to be more effective for their institutions. In

contrast, most liaisons had not had professional development in areas within the scope of integrated higher education planning, but nearly half of the study participants indicated such training would be valuable. These findings aligned well with other quantitative and qualitative results. There is no existing academic degree program that would fully prepare professionals for the scope of the accreditation liaison role. Liaisons must learn from experience and professional development opportunities.

ALs think they need to know something about the whole institution in order to be effective, because the principles cross all areas, ALs are accountable for accuracy and integrity of all communications with the Commission, and serve as a resource for faculty and staff across their institutions. Further, the results indicated many liaisons perceive they have responsibility in areas for which they do not have authority. They must, therefore, rely on integrated approaches, skill, and finesse in managing relationships and change across their colleges and universities.

Interviewees discussed ways in which they thought liaisons might be better prepared for the challenges inherent in the role. First, over half of the conversations included references to the SACSCOC annual meeting. While the annual meeting undoubtedly is a valued opportunity for professional development, respondents overall believed the Commission could offer more sessions specific to the AL role. One participant noted she remembered reviewing the entire program for the last annual meeting, which lasted four days, and only one concurrent session was obviously and specifically for ALs. It would be fair to posit that all of the sessions relate to the work of liaisons; at the same time, some of these overarching topics such as change management and program development could be very helpful for those who hold the AL role.

Other areas for professional development potential that emerged from the findings of this study included establishing a formal professional network or professional organization for

accreditation liaisons nationwide, and encouraging SACSCOC to include liaisons more in institutional peer review processes. Although the latter is discussed below, the former deserves some attention here. Not all of the regional accrediting agencies have formally recognized positions for accreditation liaisons or accreditation liaison officers, but several do. In such a volatile contemporary environment for higher education funding and accountability, liaisons really need to be at the forefront of conversations that will likely affect their institutions. The researcher herself feels compelled to hold memberships in many professional organizations that relate to the AL role, including the (a) College and University Professional Association for Human Resources; (b) Association for Institutional Research; (c) Southern Association for Institutional Research; (d) Society for College and University Planning; and (e) the National Association for College and University Business Officers. One professional association for liaisons could conceivably save a great deal of time and money for institutions while also providing improved breadth and depth of professional development for liaisons.

Challenges With SACSCOC AL Responsibilities

The researcher's fifth research objective was to explore the level of challenge SACSCOC ALs experienced carrying out SACS-specified responsibilities, as excerpted from the Commission's AL policy (2007, pp. 1-2):

1. Ensuring that compliance with accreditation requirements is incorporated into the planning and evaluation process of the institution.
2. Notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission.
3. Familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the Commission's accrediting policies and procedures, and with particular sections of the accrediting standards and Commission policies that have application to certain aspects of the campus (e.g., library, continuing education) especially when such documents are adopted or revised.

4. Serving as a contact person for Commission staff. This includes encouraging institutional staff to route routine inquiries about the *Principles of Accreditation* and accreditation policies and processes through the Accreditation Liaison, who will contact Commission staff, if necessary, and ensuring that e-mail from the Commission office does not get trapped in the institution's spam filter.
5. Coordinating the preparation of the annual profiles and any other reports requested by the Commission.
6. Serving as a resource person during the decennial review process and helping prepare for and coordinating reaffirmation and other accrediting visits.
7. Ensuring that electronic institutional data collected by the Commission is accurate and timely.
8. Maintaining a file of all accreditation materials, such as reports related to the decennial review; accreditation committee reports; accreditation manuals, standards, and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence from accrediting offices.

The mixed-method research design added value to the findings of this study, as was expected by the researcher based on guidance from research methodologists Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) and Creswell and Miller (2000), among others. The level of challenge ALs experienced carrying out the responsibilities delineated above was explored through quantitative measures, as reported in Chapter 4.

Interestingly, however, results from the qualitative phase of the study led the researcher to conclude most driving and blocking forces experienced by ALs in the SACSCOC region are not addressed in the stated responsibilities for the position. Clearly, the qualitative results augmented, rather than supported, quantitative findings in this study. Major areas of challenge and support cut across all areas of responsibility: communication, level of authority, influencing the behaviors of others, work load, technology, and resources. Following a concise and general overview of the findings for each item in this area of the study, as it relates to other items on the list, these overarching themes will be discussed further.

Responsibility one above (ensuring that compliance with accreditation requirements is incorporated into the planning and evaluation process of the institution) was found to be “always challenging” among the majority of survey respondents. Interviews resulted in a better understanding of the reason for this elevated level. Typically, the root of the problem was ineffective organizational structure and, therefore, lines of communication. In other words, often ALs are not in a position to influence institutional planning, policy, and/or evaluation. Another major barrier, as established by the results of this study, has to do with liaisons’ lack of knowledge about program developments or other changes that the Commission considers to be substantive. Based on interview results, the researcher also concluded these two more fundamental root problems were the reasons survey responses around notifying the Commission of substantive changes (notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission) were found overall to be “often challenging” for ALs.

Responsibility six above (serving as a resource person during the decennial review process and helping prepare for and coordinating reaffirmation and other accrediting visits) was found to be the area of highest challenge among survey respondents, although actual site visits did not come up at all in the interviews. Somewhat related topics of conversation included the work load associated with reaffirmation, communication with the Commission and internal institutional colleagues while preparing for compliance certification, and difficulty preparing the compliance report and required documentation. Most of these challenges were a result of internal structures, processes, or communication—or the lack thereof.

Areas two (notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission), three

(familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the Commission’s accrediting policies and procedures, and with particular sections of the accrediting standards and Commission policies that have application to certain aspects of the campus, e.g., library, continuing education, especially when such documents are adopted or revised), and eight (maintaining a file of all accreditation materials, such as reports related to the decennial review; accreditation committee reports; accreditation manuals, standards, and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence from accrediting offices) in the AL list of responsibilities both found to be “often challenging” for liaisons. The researcher attributes this level of difficulty to deficiencies in communication and complexities in technology, as these were two themes that came up quite often in the interviews.

Responsibilities four (serving as a contact person for Commission staff—this includes encouraging institutional staff to route routine inquiries about the *Principles of Accreditation* and accreditation policies and processes through the Accreditation Liaison, who will contact Commission staff, if necessary, and ensuring that e-mail from the Commission office does not get trapped in the institution’s spam filter), five (coordinating the preparation of the annual profiles and any other reports requested by the Commission), and seven (ensuring that electronic institutional data collected by the Commission is accurate and timely) all resulted in overall outcomes of “sometimes challenging.” Based on the researcher’s own experience, these three areas are very straightforward in terms of meeting the Commission’s expectations. SACSCOC sends e-mail requests for standard data two or three times a year. Usually these data are easily retrieved and populated into uncomplicated form templates. Further, time lines are generally very reasonable, with the agency setting deadlines of two or more weeks from the date of the request.

The researcher determined overarching themes in respondents' blocking forces. At the top of the list was a lack of communication. Often the AL felt she/he did not know what was happening on campus; thus, it would be impossible to be effective carrying out the stated responsibilities. Liaisons, as established above, need to be aware of planning and implementation of changes across many areas of an institution. Reaffirmation of accreditation occurs every 10 years in the SACS region. Between those comprehensive reviews, Fifth-Year Interim Reports must be submitted to the Commission. However, there are many instances other than these major milestones that require formal notification and/or a full prospectus requesting approval for "substantive changes" in an institution's programming or operations.

Substantive changes are defined by SACS as "a significant modification or expansion in the nature and scope of an accredited institution" (SACSCOC, retrieved 5/14/11). Expounding on this statement, the Commission explains, "Every institution has an Accreditation Liaison whose charge is to ensure compliance with accreditation requirements. The Accreditation Liaison should take the time to become familiar with the Commission's policies and procedures, ensure that substantive changes are recognized and reported in a timely fashion, and consult with the institution's COC staff member about any questions."

Undoubtedly, it is problematic for a liaison to be unaware of planning and important decisions inside their own college or university. Equally as precarious are situations in which a liaison is unaware of changes to SACSCOC requirements or to the evolving interpretations of those requirements. For all of the areas respondents found their stated responsibilities to be always or often challenging, these blocking forces are strengthened, making their jobs more difficult, if they are not directly involved in strategic planning as well as general decision-making processes that may have implications for compliance with accreditation requirements.

As professionals in higher education become better at assessment, more sophisticated with accreditation and issues of accountability, more acculturated to viewing their work through the lenses of multiple stakeholders, their own lenses become clearer over time. A major tenet of Lewin's Field Theory involved group dynamics and comparative theory. Meta-inferences drawn through analysis of all data collected in this study fit with Back's (1986) and Lewin's (1948) considerations: structures and objects vary depending on points in time and place. Findings of this research further support these earlier scholars' positions, most especially as they relate to changing perceptions and/or interpretations of both accreditation and the principles of accreditation over time.

Knowing SACSCOC policies and procedures is essential. Over time, however, the evolving interpretation and expected application of the agency's requirements is equally as critical. Informal expectations escalate over time as the higher education community becomes more skilled through professional development and practice. The interpretation of principles has changed over time, as established in the qualitative findings, and that is a major issue. If an AL is new, is not involved in peer review, does not participate in SACSCOC events, and does not work with someone who is well-versed, this researcher posits they will be less effective in preparing SACS documents, especially compliance certification reports for reaffirmation.

One interviewee discussed the difficulty an institution experiences understanding what they need to do to address areas noted as not in compliance if the review committee does not specify in the report submitted in response to a compliance report or focused report. "We scratched our heads and said 'where's the rationale for the non-compliance? Tell us what we need to do to make this acceptable'" (Case 72). Of course, this institution responded to the accreditation standard in their original compliance report according to their interpretation of that

standard. They believed they were addressing the standard effectively. So, in order for them to address it differently, they would need some level of guidance regarding what was lacking.

One specific issue around interpretation was raised consistently by interviewees. The Commission has standards to ensure faculty members have the appropriate credentials to teach each and every course to which they are assigned. With this example, the interpretation of the standards is a problem, as are the facts that the AL is typically not the person setting minimum standards for faculty positions or hiring faculty, and may not be involved in any communication about who is being hired to teach courses. This situation exemplifies not only that the AL needs to be included in communications deliberately, but also that others on campus need to be well-versed in accreditation requirements.

Several of the study participants noted a more problematic situation is one in which they did not have any information. In other words, if they knew of a change in policy, procedure, or programming that had implications for SACSCOC reporting and/or documentation, they could take steps to ensure those requirements are met—whether through their own authority or that of the person to whom they reported. However, not knowing about something altogether was a bigger problem. Being unaware of a situation related to their SACS-specified responsibilities certainly led to their inability to fulfill those requirements. Lack of awareness was noted to have occurred through a couple of primary means, including not being invited to participate in conversations that might result in connections to accreditation issues, and others not recognizing when accreditation issues were relevant. In sum, this area for future research would involve an investigation of the means through which ALs learn about SACSCOC-related initiatives and/or changes on their campuses.

Following SACSCOC's Recommendations

The sixth objective was the last one to be included in the quantitative phase of the research design. The purpose of this objective was to determine the extent to which liaisons have followed SACSCOC's recommendations in preparing to meet AL responsibilities. The Commission refers to these recommendations in terms of methods to become effective ALs. Below, each recommendation is excerpted from the SACS Accreditation Policy Statement and is followed by a discussion of the qualitative and quantitative research findings.

SACS Recommendation One: Learn about the Commission on Colleges and the way it works by reviewing the following sections of its Website (www.sacscoc.org): general information about the Commission; the Principles of Accreditation; policies and publications of the Commission; institutional resources, including handbooks, manuals, and guides; upcoming meetings and events. Quantitative findings indicated almost half of the respondents visited the SACSCOC Website on a monthly basis. Lack of communication with Commission staff was not a topic that emerged in the qualitative phase of the study.

The researcher believes this might be because people do not know what they do not know; in other words, if they are unaware of policy changes or official statements by the Commission, they may not remember or take the time to visit the site regularly just to see if there are any new announcements. The Commission may be well-advised to provide a little extra support to institutions by sending them a short e-mail when important updates are published on the site.

SACS Recommendation Two: Maintain contact with the Commission staff member assigned to your institution. Typically, ALs are not in contact with their SACSCOC staff members unless there is a specific accreditation action in progress, such as reaffirmation, the

Fifth-Year Interim Report, or a substantive change. Communication may be enhanced if each SACSCOC vice president offered a general session during the annual meeting, in which leaders from each of the institutions assigned to her/him could attend. Participation in such a forum would enable the Commission staffer to share information about priorities, ongoing discussions, and/or impending policy or procedure changes about which college and university leaders should be aware.

SACS Recommendation Three: Get involved in Commission activities by attending the annual meeting and serving as a peer evaluator. Research findings indicated a positive correlation between attending the SACSCOC annual meeting and a lower overall challenge score related to fulfilling SACS-specified responsibilities. The same was true for participation in the summer institute and Substantive Change Drive-In Workshops. The more SACS professional development meetings ALs attended, the less challenging the job.

Serving as a peer evaluator, as noted above, is one way in which the Commission states ALs can become better prepared to fulfill their responsibilities. The findings of this study indicate that over 70% of ALs have never served on an Off-Site Review Committee. Further, those respondents who had not served on Off-Site Review Committees indicated higher levels of challenge carrying out SACS-specified responsibilities than did their counterparts who had served as peer evaluators.

SACSCOC invites participation on review committees based on recommendations from institutional CEOs. This area, therefore, is ripe for additional investigation. The researcher would question whether institutional CEOs are in fact recommending their liaisons for service, as well as whether Commission staff are providing ALs opportunities to serve. This service is important when trying to understand how interpretation and application of standards are evolving. If an AL

is not serving on committees, she/he will not fully understand the review process, how committees communicate, how inter-rater reliability is reinforced, or why committees communicate with institutions via particular methods. Based on personal experience, the researcher is aware of the significant learning that takes place while serving as a peer reviewer, whether on-site or off-site.

SACS Recommendations Four and Five are closely related: Four states, “Become acquainted with the institution’s accreditation history by reviewing past correspondence with the Commission and materials stemming from previous reaffirmation or substantive change reviews.” Almost all study participants had followed the Commission’s recommendation in this area. Ninety-five percent indicated they had reviewed their institution’s historical accreditation documents as needed or more than was necessary.

Recommendation five suggests liaisons “ensure that reports to the Commission and significant correspondence from the Commission are archived for future reference.” Only four participants responded they had not followed this recommendation.

The researcher believes these last two recommendations are well-followed by ALs because they are relatively simple. At the same time, it is important that liaisons understand historical documents may have been prepared according to obsolete requirements. Perhaps it is this reason that many respondents felt they had spent more time than was necessary reviewing their institutions’ accreditation files. It is important to understand accreditation history, but one might posit it is more important to understand contemporary expectations.

Summative Extrapolations

An exhaustive literature review concluded with a dearth of published research related to accreditation liaisons or any type of liaison representing the interests of two separate

organizations. Therefore, the findings of this study add to the knowledge base and promote areas for further investigation. The most notable extrapolations from this study are those that resulted from analysis of both phases of the research design. Qualitative and quantitative findings were complementary and valuable in developing the conclusions below.

Overall, ALs who participated in this study enjoy their jobs. Internal driving forces include personal and professional satisfaction; pride; recognition; accomplishment; optimism; being part of something important in the institution; making a positive impact on learning outcomes, systems and institutional reputation; and continuous quality improvement of the institution. Participants across the board believe the process and outcomes of accreditation are valuable. Moreover, they tend to believe their institutional colleagues are getting better at assessment and accreditation. Some hypothesize the reason for improvement may be attributed to the systematic processes that have been institutionalized over time. They believe progress has been made across the board, in spite of notable resistance at times. Even in circumstances wherein ALs stated they do not have an institutional culture that supports accreditation, most liaisons would continue in their positions if given the choice. The most formidable challenges faced by liaisons are not specifically related to any of the roles SACSCOC sets for the position, but rather have more to do with process and communication.

The researcher thought the findings of this study would indicate driving and blocking forces related to the responsibilities of the AL and how to become an effective AL—the two most detailed areas of the SACS Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement (see Appendix 1). Instead, meta-inferences drawn from all qualitative and quantitative data indicate factors which support or inhibit liaisons' ability to perform their SACSCOC-related responsibilities were found

to relate primarily to a relatively brief section of the policy statement: Selecting the Accreditation Liaison. The policy states:

The Commission strongly recommends that the chief executive officer appoint as the institution's Accreditation Liaison a senior faculty member or administrator who reports directly to the chief executive officer and has a suitable degree of visibility on campus. The liaison should not be a consultant employed to assist the institution during its decennial review. All official communications from the Commission will continue to go to the chief executive officer (SACSCOC, 2007, p. 1).

Upon a comprehensive examination of the quantitative and qualitative findings, the researcher has concluded it would be most effective for the Commission to strongly recommend, or even require, that the Accreditation Liaison be an institution's chief academic officer (CAO). There are many reasons for this position, but all of them are related to resolving a great deal of the challenges faced by the participants in this study. Justification follows:

- Reporting lines were both driving and blocking forces for liaisons. None of the CAOs who participated in the study noted responsibility without authority as a blocking force.
- CAOs are always on an institution's senior management team and, therefore, at the table for important conversations and decision-making processes.
- The CAO has the ability to guide strategic planning and to ensure SACS principles are integrated into institutional policies and procedures.
- A CAO is both a senior administrator and a senior faculty member, thereby possessing authority for administrative and academic matters.
- A CAO is always an academician and has credibility as a faculty member, among faculty members.

- CAOs have responsibility and authority for professional and non-professional academic programs, as well as the capacity to bring faculty from each discipline-type together to build internal capacity for understanding fundamentals of accreditation as a value-added academic endeavor.
- Many of the participants in this research were senior administrators who had been hired very close to upcoming reaffirmation of accreditation. If an institution's CAO were the AL, she/he probably would be more effective in garnering the faculty involvement and support to produce compliance certification documents. This would be an interesting area for future research.
- CAOs have the ability to promote faculty development in academic program assessment, lead the development of an organic culture of assessment, and reward faculty for involvement and best practices related to continuous program improvement.
- CAOs are responsible for hiring qualified faculty, which has been established throughout this study as a challenge faced by many ALs.
- ALs are accountable, by virtue of the SACS Accreditation Liaison Policy Statement, for the accuracy and integrity of all documents submitted to the Commission, yet may have very little control over the content or preparation of those documents. CAOs who are also liaisons have both.

Finally, and most compellingly, a detailed review of SACSCOC's Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement confirms there are two people in an institution that hold the ideal combination of responsibility and authority for ensuring compliance—the CEO and the CAO. As Appendix 11 demonstrates, every core

requirement, comprehensive standard, or federal requirement within the principles falls within the purview of one of these two individuals. It is this researcher's position, then, that those are the two senior administrators who should be accountable for the accuracy and integrity of accreditation-related activities.

Building on the work of Benjamin and Klein (2006) and Klein, Benjamin, Shavelson, and Bolus (2007), interviews with study participants supported the premise that accountability and assessment are not mutually exclusive. The CEO and CAO represent both sides of this coin. If an institution has an effective program of assessment, accountability is not a major problem. In other words, if colleges and universities are doing what they say they are doing, and documenting what they are doing, sharing that information with stakeholders, logically, should not be a major challenge.

As Shavelson (2010) noted, however, assessment of academic programs continues to be an area of development for postsecondary institutions. Demonstrating student learning outcomes, especially in liberal arts and sciences programs or other programs without discipline-specific accreditation requirements, is still largely an area of institutional culture change. The qualitative findings in this study support these statements. As assessment becomes more acculturated, calls for accountability are met with less resistance. This is where the CAO has the most influence among faculty.

Although stakeholders internal and external to the higher education community continue to stress the need for accountability, and this accountability is still perceived negatively by many in the academy, this researcher and her fellow ALs believe the pressure is making a positive difference in the quality of American postsecondary institutions. More importantly, there has been a positive impact on student learning outcomes, which are the real reason we do what we

do. Accountability is becoming institutionalized, acculturated, across the region. It is not happening overnight, but it is happening. That is clear from the feedback of liaisons. There are challenges. There probably always will be challenges. But we are making headway.

Reiterating the whole purpose of accreditation, as stated by the president of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (Eaton, 2009), there are four main functions: (1) providing formal recognition of quality, (2) providing funding agencies with information to support aid programs, (3) promoting confidence among prospective students and/or employers as they consider educational quality and credentials, and 4) promoting continuing education and donors' decisions to contribute to the educational enterprise. The researcher hoped, at the beginning of this project, that the findings would support SACSCOC, as well as senior administrators in postsecondary institutions, in their considerations of AL policies, roles, responsibilities, characteristics, and professional development. Research results and inferences have been presented toward this end. Also, areas for further consideration and future research have been suggested.

The interpretive rigor within this study was supported by the inferences discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Results were consistent across the two phases of the research design, and the researcher posits other scholars would reach similar findings and suggestions for further investigation. The objectives of the study have been addressed comprehensively as a result of the mixed-method design. Findings may also be useful for regional accrediting agencies other than the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Transferability is likely possible for other types of organizations wherein a liaison role is utilized to ensure the needs of two or more distinct entities are addressed effectively.

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APPENDIX 1: SACS ACCREDITATION LIAISON DESCRIPTION



*Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

THE ACCREDITATION LIAISON

The Commission on Colleges and its candidate and member institutions share responsibility for maintaining a relationship whereby both are fully informed of current accreditation issues and requirements and how those requirements are applied. In order to facilitate close and effective communication, the Commission has assigned a staff member to each candidate and member institution. This staff member establishes a working relationship with the leaders of the institution, consults with the institution during its reviews, answers questions or receives comments from the institution, maintains the Commission file on the institution, and, in general, develops a familiarity with the operations of the institution, to the extent possible.

Each candidate and member institution can help fulfill its responsibilities and complement this relationship with Commission staff by appointing an Accreditation Liaison.

Selecting the Accreditation Liaison

The Commission strongly recommends that the chief executive officer appoint as the institution's Accreditation Liaison a senior faculty member or administrator who reports directly to the chief executive officer and has a suitable degree of visibility on campus. The liaison should not be a consultant employed to assist the institution during its decennial review. All official communications from the Commission will continue to go to the chief executive officer.

Responsibilities of the Accreditation Liaison

The Accreditation Liaison is responsible for the following:

1. Ensuring that compliance with accreditation requirements is incorporated into the planning and evaluation process of the institution.
2. Notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission.
3. Familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the Commission's accrediting policies and procedures, and with particular sections of the accrediting standards and Commission policies that have application to certain aspects of the campus (e.g., library, continuing education) especially when such documents are adopted or revised.
4. Serving as a contact person for Commission staff. This includes encouraging institutional staff to route routine inquiries about the *Principles of Accreditation* and accreditation policies and processes through the AL, who will contact Commission staff, if necessary, and ensuring that e-mail from the Commission office does not get trapped in the institution's spam filter.

5. Coordinating the preparation of the annual profiles and any other reports requested by the Commission.
6. Serving as a resource person during the decennial review process and helping prepare for and coordinating reaffirmation and other accrediting visits.
7. Ensuring that electronic institutional data collected by the Commission is accurate and timely.
8. Maintaining a file of all accreditation materials, such as, reports related to the decennial review; accreditation committee reports; accreditation manuals, standards, and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence from accrediting offices.

How to Become an Effective Accreditation Liaison

Effective communication between member institutions and Commission staff is the key to ensuring that institutions are kept informed of current accreditation issues and requirements and that the Commission is made aware of institutional perspectives and concerns that touch accreditation issues. To develop an effective relationship between the institution and the Commission staff member, the Accreditation Liaison may want to

1. Learn about the Commission on Colleges and the way it works by reviewing the following sections of the its Website (www.sacscoc.org):
 - general information about the Commission
 - the *Principles of Accreditation*
 - policies and publications of the Commission
 - institutional resources, including handbooks, manuals, and guides
 - upcoming meetings and events
2. Maintain contact with the Commission staff member assigned to your institution.
3. Get involved in Commission activities by attending the annual meeting and serving as a peer evaluator.
4. Become acquainted with the institution's accreditation history by reviewing past correspondence with the Commission and materials stemming from previous reaffirmation or substantive change reviews.
5. Ensure that reports to the Commission and significant correspondence from the Commission are archived for future reference.

Endorsed: Commission on Colleges, June 2000
Edited: January 2007

APPENDIX 2: SACS REAFFIRMATION RESULTS 2009-2010

Principles Sections with Highest Percentage of Negative Findings By Stage of the Reaffirmation Process

Track 2009-B institutions (December 2009 Commission action)

Level III, IV, V, and VI only

Total Institutions: 39

Off-Site Review				On-Site Review				C&R Review			
25% or higher noncompliance				10% or higher with recommendations				5% or higher with monitoring			
Rank	Item		% non-compliance	Rank	Item		% receiving recommendations(s)	Rank	Item		% in monitoring
1	3.3.1	IE(any section)	82%	1	2.12.	QEP	69%	1	3.3.1.1	IE- educational programs	31%
1	3.7.1.	Faculty Competence	82%	2	3.3.1	IE (any section)	54%	2	3.3.1	IE (any section)	31%
3	3.3.1.3	IE- educational support	72%	3	3.3.1.1	IE- educational program	49%	3	3.3.1.2	IE- administrative	18%
4	3.3.1.2	IE- administrative	69%	4	3.3.1.5	IE- comm/pub service	35%	4	3.3.1.5	IE- comm/pub service	16%
5	3.3.1.1	IE- educational programs	67%	5	3.7.1.	Faculty competence	33%	5	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	13%
6	3.3.1.5	IE- comm/pub service	65%	6	3.3.1.2	IE- administrative	33%	6	3.3.1.4	IE- research	11%
7	3.3.1.4	IE- research	64%	7	3.3.1.3	IE- educational support	28%	7	3.3.1.3	IE- educational support	10%
8	2.11.1.	Financial Resources	62%	8	3.3.1.4	IE- research	25%	7	3.10.1	Financial stability	10%
9	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	55%	9	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	19%	9	3.5.4	Terminal degrees of faculty	10%
10	3.2.10.	Administrative staff evaluations	49%	10	3.5.4.	Terminal degrees of faculty	13%	10	3.4.7.	Consortia relationships/ contractual agreements	5%
11	3.5.4.	Terminal degrees of faculty	47%	11	2.8.	Faculty	13%	11	2.8.	Faculty	5%
12	3.2.5.	Board dismissal	44%	12	3.4.7.	Consortia relationships/ contractual agreements	11%	11	3.2.10.	Administrative staff evaluations	5%
13	3.7.2.	Faculty evaluation	41%	13	3.2.14.	Intellectual property rights	10%	11	4.7.	Title IV program responsibilities	5%
14	4.5.	Student complaints	36%	13	3.10.1.	Financial stability	10%				
15	3.4.8.	Noncredit to credit	34%	13	2.12 NC	QEP- as Core Requirement	10%				
16	3.4.7.	Consortia relationships/ contractual agreements	34%								
17	2.5.	Institutional Effectiveness	33%								
17	2.8.	Faculty	33%								
17	4.7.	Title IV program responsibilities	33%								
20	3.2.1.	CEO selection/ evaluation	31%								
20	3.2.14.	Intellectual property rights	31%								
22	3.10.4.	Control of finances	31%								
23	3.10.5.	Control of sponsored research/ external funds	29%								
24	3.9.3.	Qualified staff [student services]	28%								
24	3.11.1.	Control of physical resources	28%								
24	3.14.1.	Accreditation Status	28%								

Principles Sections with Highest Percentage of Negative Findings By Stage of the Reaffirmation Process

Track 2010-B institutions (December 2010 Commission action)

Level III, IV, V, and VI only

Total Institutions: 44

Off-Site Review				On-Site Review				C&R Review			
25% or higher noncompliance				10% or higher with recommendations				5% or higher with monitoring			
Rank	Item		% non-compliance	Rank	Item		% receiving recommendations(s)	Rank	Item		% in monitoring
1	3.3.1	IE (any section)	89%	1	3.3.1	IE (any section)	59%	1	3.3.1	IE (any section)	34%
2	2.11.1.	Financial Resources	82%	2	3.3.2	QEP - CS	48%	2	3.3.1.1	IE - educational programs	23%
3	3.7.1.	Faculty competence	80%	3	3.3.1.1	IE - educational programs	45%	3	3.3.1.5	IE - comm/pub service	14%
4	3.3.1.3	IE - educational support	73%	4	3.3.1.5	IE - comm/pub service	29%	4	3.3.1.2	IE - administrative	14%
5	3.3.1.1	IE - educational programs	70%	5	3.3.1.2	IE - administrative	27%	4	3.10.1.	Financial stability	14%
6	3.3.1.5	IE - comm/pub service	67%	6	3.3.1.3	IE - educational support	25%	6	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	13%
7	3.3.1.2	IE - administrative	59%	6	3.5.4.	Terminal degrees of faculty	25%	7	3.3.1.3	IE - educational support	11%
8	3.3.1.4	IE - research	55%	8	3.7.1.	Faculty competence	23%	7	3.10.4.	Control of finances	11%
9	3.4.7.	Consortia relationships/ contractual agreements	51%	9	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	18%	9	3.3.1.4	IE - research	10%
10	3.2.13.	Institution-related foundations	50%	10	3.3.1.4	IE - research	17%	10	4.7.	Title IV program responsibilities	8%
11	3.2.10.	Administrative staff evaluations	48%	11	3.10.1.	Financial stability	16%	11	2.5.	Institutional Effectiveness	7%
12	3.5.4.	Terminal degrees of faculty	48%	12	4.7.	Title IV program responsibilities	15%	12	3.5.4.	Terminal degrees of faculty	5%
13	2.5.	Institutional Effectiveness	43%	13	3.10.4.	Control of finances	11%	13	3.11.3.	Physical facilities	5%
14	3.2.5.	Board dismissal	41%	14	2.5.	Institutional Effectiveness	11%	14	3.2.10.	Administrative staff evaluations	5%
15	2.8.	Faculty	36%					14	3.7.1.	Faculty competence	5%
15	3.2.1.	CEO selection/ evaluation	36%								
17	3.5.1.	College-level competencies	35%								
18	3.10.4.	Control of finances	34%								
19	3.2.3.	Board conflict of interest	34%								
20	3.4.11.	Academic program coordination	32%								
20	3.7.2.	Faculty evaluation	32%								
20	3.10.1.	Financial stability	32%								
23	4.5.	Student complaints	32%								
24	3.2.2	Governing board control-total	30%								
25	3.2.14.	Intellectual property rights	27%								
25	3.6.1.	Post-baccalaureate program rigor	27%								
25	3.8.1.	Learning/ info resources	27%								
25	3.9.3.	Qualified staff [student services]	27%								
25	3.10.2.	Submission of financial statements	27%								
30	3.11.3.	Physical facilities	27%								
30	3.14.1.	Accreditation Status	27%								
32	3.2.11.	Control of intercollegiate athletics	26%								
33	3.1.1.	Mission	25%								
33	3.9.2.	Student records	25%								

APPENDIX 3: SACS INTEGRITY AND ACCURACY IN INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION



Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

INTEGRITY AND ACCURACY IN INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION

- Policy Statement –

Institutional integrity serves as the foundation of the relationship between the Commission on Colleges and its member and candidate institutions. This fundamental philosophy is reflected in the *Principles of Accreditation* as follows:

Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member and candidate institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions.

Integrity in the accreditation process is best understood in the context of peer review, professional judgment by peers of commonly accepted sound academic practice, and the conscientious application of the *Principles of Accreditation* as mutually agreed upon standards for accreditation. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions and for institutions to make reasonable and responsible decisions consistent with the spirit of integrity in all matters. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information to the public, failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission, or failing to conduct a candid self-assessment of compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and to submit this assessment to the Commission, and other similar practices will be seen as the lack of a full commitment to integrity. The Commission's policy statement "Integrity and Accuracy in Institutional Representation" gives examples of the application of the principle of integrity in accreditation activities. The policy is not all-encompassing nor does it address all possible situations. Failure of an institution to adhere to the integrity principle may result in a loss of accreditation or candidacy.

The *Principles* includes the following requirement:

PI 1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters.

As a condition of candidacy or membership in the Commission on Colleges, the institution agrees to document its compliance with the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*; to comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies; and to make complete, accurate and honest disclosure to the Commission.

The Commission's policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership" states that the Commission on Colleges requires a member institution to comply with the Principle of Integrity, Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, Federal Requirements, and Commission policies and procedures, and to provide information as requested by the Commission in order to maintain membership and accreditation. The policy also states:

Failure to respond appropriately to Commission decisions and requests or to make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, including the denial or revocation of candidacy or accreditation. (p. 1)

In order to comply with these requirements for integrity and accuracy in reporting in its relationships with the Commission, the president of the institution is obligated to review and ensure the accuracy and integrity of materials submitted by the institution, such as the Compliance Certification and Quality Enhancement Plan. In addition, an institution shall meet the following expectations:

1. Ensure that all documents submitted to the Commission are candid and provide all pertinent information, whether complimentary or otherwise. With due regard for the rights of individual privacy, every institution applying for candidacy, extension of candidacy, accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation, as well as every candidate and accredited institution, provide the Commission with access to all parts of its operations, and with complete and accurate information about the institution's affairs, including reports of other accrediting, licensing, and auditing agencies.
2. Respond in a timely manner to requests by the Commission for submission of dues, fees, reports, or other information.
3. Ensure that information submitted to the Commission (such as that provided in the annual institutional profile, institutional responses to visiting committee reports, and monitoring reports) is complete, accurate, and current.
4. Cooperate with the Commission in preparation for visits, receives visiting committees in a spirit of collegiality, and complies with the Commission's requests for acceptable reports and self-analyses.
5. Report substantive changes, including the initiation of new programs or sites outside the region, or new sites within the region in accordance with the Commission policy on substantive change.
6. Report accurately to the public its status and relationship with the Commission.
7. Provide counsel and advice to the Commission, and agree to have its faculty and administrators serve, within reason, on visiting teams and on Commission committees.
8. Provide the Commission or its representatives with information requested and maintains an openness and cooperation during evaluations, enabling evaluators to perform their duties with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

The Commission accredits institutions, not individuals. Therefore, any individual who reports to the Commission on behalf of an institution—either by virtue of his or her office or as delegated by the chief executive officer of the institution—obligates the institution in all matters regarding institutional integrity.

Approved: Commission on Colleges, June 1993
Revised in accord with the Principles of Accreditation: February 2004
Revised in accord with the Principles: December 2006

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH POPULATION

SACS Members July 2010:
Public or Private Not-for-Profit, Level III or Higher Institutions, in the United States

	Institution	City	State	Initial Accr.	Last Reaffirm	Next Reaffirm	Control	Level	Degrees
1	Asbury University	Wilmore	KY	1940	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
2	Auburn University	Auburn University	AL	1922	2004	2013	Public	VI	BMESD
3	Auburn University at Montgomery	Montgomery	AL	1968	2008	2018	Public	V	BMESD
4	Augusta State University	Augusta	GA	1926	2001	2012	Public	IV	ABMES
5	Austin College	Sherman	TX	1947	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
6	Austin Graduate School of Theology	Austin	TX	1987	2003	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
7	Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary	Austin	TX	1973	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
8	The Baptist College of Florida	Graceville	FL	1981	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
9	Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary	Jacksonville	TX	1986	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
10	Barton College	Wilson	NC	1955	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
11	Bellarmino University	Louisville	KY	1956	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
12	Belmont University	Nashville	TN	1959	2000	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
13	Berry College	Mount Berry	GA	1957	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	BMES
14	Bethel University	McKenzie	TN	1952	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
15	Bethune-Cookman University	Daytona Beach	FL	1947	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
16	Brenau University	Gainesville	GA	1947	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	BMES
17	Brescia University	Owensboro	KY	1957	1999	2009	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
18	Campbell University	Buies Creek	NC	1941	2000	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
19	Carson-Newman College	Jefferson City	TN	1927	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
20	Centenary College of Louisiana	Shreveport	LA	1925	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
21	Chowan University	Murfreesboro	NC	1956	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
22	Christendom College	Front Royal	VA	1996	2003	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
23	Christian Brothers University	Memphis	TN	1958	2000	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM

24	Claflin University	Orangeburg	SC	1947	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
25	Clearwater Christian College	Clearwater	FL	1984	1999	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
26	Clemson University	Clemson	SC	1927	2002	2013	Public	VI	BMESD
27	Coastal Carolina University	Conway	SC	1976	2001	2012	Public	III	ABM
28	Columbia College	Columbia	SC	1938	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
29	Columbia Theological Seminary	Decatur	GA	1983	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
30	Concordia University Texas	Austin	TX	1968	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
31	Cumberland University	Lebanon	TN	1962	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
32	Dallas Baptist University	Dallas	TX	1959	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
33	Duke University	Durham	NC	1895	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	ABMD
34	East Carolina University	Greenville	NC	1927	2002	2013	Public	V	BMESD
35	East Tennessee State University	Johnson City	TN	1927	2002	2013	Public	VI	ABMESD
36	Eastern Mennonite University	Harrisonburg	VA	1959	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
37	Eastern Virginia Medical School	Norfolk	VA	1984	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
38	Elizabeth City State University	Elizabeth City	NC	1947	2001	2011	Public	III	BM
39	Elon University	Elon	NC	1947	2002	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
40	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University	Daytona Beach	FL	1968	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
41	Erskine College	Due West	SC	1925	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
42	Faulkner University	Montgomery	AL	1971	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
43	Fayetteville State University	Fayetteville	NC	1947	2001	2011	Public	V	ABMD
44	Fisk University	Nashville	TN	1930	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
45	Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	Tallahassee	FL	1935	2009	2018	Public	VI	BMD
46	Florida Atlantic University	Boca Raton	FL	1967	2002	2013	Public	VI	BMD
47	Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences	Orlando	FL	1996	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
48	Florida International University	Miami	FL	1974	2000	2010	Public	VI	ABMESD
49	Florida Memorial University	Miami Gardens	FL	1951	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
50	Florida Southern College	Lakeland	FL	1935	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
51	Fort Valley State University	Fort Valley	GA	1951	2000	2010	Public	III	ABM
52	Francis Marion University	Florence	SC	1972	2008	2018	Public	IV	ABMES
53	Freed-Hardeman University	Henderson	TN	1956	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	BMES

54	Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing	Hyden	KY	2004	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
55	Furman University	Greenville	SC	1924	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	BMES
56	George Mason University	Fairfax	VA	1972	2001	2011	Public	VI	BMD
57	Georgetown College	Georgetown	KY	1919	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
58	Georgia State University	Atlanta	GA	1952	2008	2018	Public	VI	ABMESD
59	Grambling State University	Grambling	LA	1949	2003	2010	Public	V	ABMESD
60	Hampton University	Hampton	VA	1932	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
61	Hodges University	Naples	FL	1998	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
62	Houston Baptist University	Houston	TX	1968	2002	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
63	Interdenominational Theological Center	Atlanta	GA	1984	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
64	Jackson State University	Jackson	MS	1948	2001	2011	Public	VI	BMESD
65	Jacksonville University	Jacksonville	FL	1950	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
66	James Madison University	Harrisonburg	VA	1927	2002	2013	Public	VI	BMESD
67	Jefferson College of Health Science	Roanoke	VA	1986	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
68	Kentucky Christian University	Grayson	KY	1984	1999	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
69	Kentucky State University	Frankfort	KY	1939	2009	2019	Public	III	ABM
70	King College	Bristol	TN	1947	2009	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
71	LaGrange College	LaGrange	GA	1946	2002	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	ABMES
72	Lamar University	Beaumont	TX	1955	2010	2019	Public	VI	ABMD
73	Lenoir-Rhyne University	Hickory	NC	1928	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
74	Life University	Marietta	GA	1986	2004	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
75	Lincoln Memorial University	Harrogate	TN	1936	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMESD
76	Lindsey Wilson College	Columbia	KY	1951	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
77	Louisiana College	Pineville	LA	1923	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
78	Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary	Louisville	KY	1973	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
79	Lubbock Christian University	Lubbock	TX	1963	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
80	Lynn University	Boca Raton	FL	1967	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
81	Marymount University	Arlington	VA	1958	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
82	Medical College of Georgia	Augusta	GA	1973	2000	2011	Public	VI	ABMD
83	Memphis College of Art	Memphis	TN	1963	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM

84	Memphis Theological Seminary	Memphis	TN	1988	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
85	Meredith College	Raleigh	NC	1921	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
86	Methodist University	Fayetteville	NC	1966	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
87	Mid-Continent University	Mayfield	KY	1987	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
88	Midwestern State University	Wichita Falls	TX	1950	2002	2013	Public	III	ABM
89	Milligan College	Milligan College	TN	1960	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
90	Millsaps College	Jackson	MS	1912	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
91	Mississippi College	Clinton	MS	1922	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMESD
92	Mississippi Valley State University	Itta Bena	MS	1968	2002	2012	Public	III	BM
93	Montreat College	Montreat	NC	1960	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
94	Morehead State University	Morehead	KY	1930	2000	2011	Public	V	ABMESD
95	Morehouse School of Medicine	Atlanta	GA	1986	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
96	Norfolk State University	Norfolk	VA	1969	2008	2018	Public	V	ABMD
97	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University	Durham	NC	1936	2000	2010	Public	V	BMD
98	North Carolina Central University	Durham	NC	1938	2009	2019	Public	V	BMD
99	North Greenville University	Tigerville	SC	1957	1999	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
100	Northern Kentucky University	Highland Heights	KY	1973	2009	2019	Public	V	ABMD
101	Oakwood University	Huntsville	AL	1958	2001	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
102	Oblate School of Theology	San Antonio	TX	1968	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
103	Oglethorpe University	Atlanta	GA	1950	2009	2017	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
104	Old Dominion University	Norfolk	VA	1961	2002	2012	Public	VI	BMESD
105	Our Lady of Holy Cross College	New Orleans	LA	1972	2009	2017	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
106	Our Lady of the Lake University	San Antonio	TX	1923	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
107	Palm Beach Atlantic University	West Palm Beach	FL	1972	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
108	Parker College of Chiropractic	Dallas	TX	1987	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BD
109	Pentecostal Theological Seminary	Cleveland	TN	1984	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
110	Pfeiffer University	Misenheimer	NC	1942	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
111	Pikeville College	Pikeville	KY	1931	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABD
112	Prairie View A&M College	Prairie View	TX	1934	2000	2010	Public	VI	BMD

113	Queens University of Charlotte	Charlotte	NC	1932	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
114	Radford University	Radford	VA	1928	2002	2012	Public	V	BMESD
115	Randolph College	Lynchburg	VA	1902	2000	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
116	Reformed Theological Seminary	Jackson	MS	1977	2003	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
117	Regent University	Virginia Beach	VA	1984	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
118	Reinhardt University	Waleska	GA	1953	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
119	Rhodes College	Memphis	TN	1911	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
120	Saint Leo University	Saint Leo	FL	1967	2002	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	IV	ABMES
121	Saint Thomas University	Miami Gardens	FL	1968	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
122	St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary	Boynton Beach	FL	1968	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	M
123	Salem College	Winston-Salem	NC	1922	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
124	Sam Houston State University	Huntsville	AL	1925	2009	2019	Public	V	BMD
125	Savannah State University	Savannah	GA	1951	2001	2011	Public	III	BM
126	Schreiner University	Kerrville	TX	1934	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
127	Shaw University	Raleigh	NC	1943	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
128	Shenandoah University	Winchester	VA	1973	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	ABMD
129	Sherman College of Chiropractic	Spartanburg	SC	2002	2009	2017	Private, Not-for-profit	V	D
130	Shorter University	Rome	GA	1923	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
131	South Carolina State University	Orangeburg	SC	1941	2000	2010	Public	V	BMESD
132	The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary	Wake Forest	NC	1978	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
133	Southeastern University, Inc	Lakeland	FL	1986	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
134	Southern Adventist University	Collegedale	TN	1950	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
135	The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary	Louisville	KY	1968	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
136	Southern College of Optometry	Memphis	TN	1967	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	D
137	Southern Methodist University	Dallas	TX	1921	2000	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
138	Southern Polytechnic State University	Marietta	GA	1964	2009	2019	Public	III	ABM
139	Southern University and A&M College at Baton Rouge	Baton Rouge	LA	1938	2000	2010	Public	V	ABMESD
140	Southern University at New Orleans	New Orleans	LA	1970	2000	2011	Public	III	ABM
141	Southern Wesleyan University	Central	SC	1973	1999	2009	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM

142	Southwestern Assemblies of God University	Waxahachie	TX	1968	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
143	Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	Fort Worth	TX	1969	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
144	Stephen F Austin State University	Nacogdoches	TX	1927	2000	2011	Public	V	BMD
145	Stetson University	Deland	FL	1932	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMESD
146	Sul Ross State University	Alpine	TX	1929	2008	2018	Public	III	ABM
147	Sweet Briar College	Sweet Briar	VA	1920	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
148	Tarleton State University	Stephenville	TX	1926	2000	2010	Public	V	ABMD
149	Tennessee State University	Nashville	TN	1946	2000	2010	Public	VI	ABMESD
150	Texas A&M University	College Station	TX	1924	2002	2012	Public	VI	BMD
151	Texas A&M University	Corpus Christi	TX	1975	2000	2010	Public	VI	ABMD
152	The Texas A&M University System Health Science Center	College Station	TX	1999	2002	2012	Public	VI	BMD
153	Texas Chiropractic College	Pasadena	TX	1984	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BD
154	Texas Christian University	Fort Worth	TX	1922	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
155	Texas Southern University	Houston	TX	1948	2000	2011	Public	VI	BMD
156	Texas State University- San Marcos	San Marcos	TX	1925	1999	2010	Public	VI	BMD
157	Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center	Lubbock	TX	2004	2009	2019	Public	VI	BMD
158	Texas Wesleyan University	Fort Worth	TX	1949	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
159	Texas Woman's College	Denton	TX	1923	2003	2013	Public	VI	BMD
160	Thomas More College	Crestview Hills	KY	1959	2002	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
161	Trevecca Nazarene University	Nashville	TN	1969	2003	2013	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
162	Trinity University	San Antonio	TX	1946	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
163	Troy University	Troy	AL	2004	2009	2019	Public	V	ABMESD
164	Tulane University	New Orleans	LA	1903	2001	2011	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
165	Tusculum College	Greenville	TN	1926	2003	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	III	BM
166	Tuskegee University	Tuskegee	AL	1933	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
167	Union Presbyterian Seminary	Richmond	VA	1997	2002	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	V	MD
168	United States Sports Academy	Daphne	AL	1983	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
169	The University of Georgia	Athens	GA	1909	2001	2011	Public	VI	ABMESD
170	University of Houston	Houston	TX	1954	2008	2018	Public	VI	BMD

171	University of Houston-Clear Lake	Sugar Land	TX	1976	2002	2012	Public	V	BMD
172	University of Kentucky	Lexington	KY	1915	2002	2013	Public	VI	ABMESD
173	The University of Louisiana at Lafayette	Lafayette	LA	1925	2000	2010	Public	VI	ABMD
174	The University of Louisiana at Monroe	Monroe	LA	1955	2009	2019	Public	VI	ABMESD
175	University of Mary Washington	Fredericksburg	VA	1930	2003	2013	Public	III	BM
176	University of Miami	Coral Gables	FL	1940	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	VI	BMD
177	University of Mississippi	University	MS	1895	2009	2019	Public	VI	BMESD
178	University of Mississippi Medical Center	Jackson	MS	1991	2001	2011	Public	VI	BMD
179	University of Montevallo	Montevallo	AL	1925	2000	2011	Public	IV	BMES
180	University of North Alabama	Florence	AL	1934	2002	2012	Public	IV	BMES
181	The University of North Carolina at Asheville	Asheville	NC	1958	2002	2012	Public	III	BM
182	The University of North Carolina at Charlotte	Charlotte	NC	1957	2002	2013	Public	VI	BMESD
183	University of North Carolina at Pembroke	Pembroke	NC	1951	2000	2010	Public	III	BM
184	The University of North Carolina at Wilmington	Wilmington	NC	1952	2002	2013	Public	V	BMD
185	University of North Florida	Jacksonville	FL	1974	2009	2019	Public	V	BMD
186	University of North Texas Health Science Center at Ft. Worth	Fort Worth	TX	1995	2000	2010	Public	VI	D
187	University of Richmond	Richmond	VA	1910	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	V	ABMD
188	University of South Alabama	Mobile	AL	1968	2003	2013	Public	VI	BMESD
189	University of South Carolina-Aiken	Aiken	SC	1977	2001	2011	Public	III	ABM
191	University of South Carolina Upstate	Spartanburg	SC	1976	2001	2012	Public	III	ABM
192	The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	Chattanooga	TN	1910	2002	2011	Public	V	BMESD
193	The University of Tennessee at Martin	Martin	TN	1951	2002	2013	Public	III	ABM
194	The University of Texas at Austin	Austin	TX	1901	2008	2018	Public	VI	BMD
195	University of Texas at Brownsville-Texas Southmost College	Brownsville	TX	1995	2008	2018	Public	V	ABMD
196	The University of Texas at Dallas	Richardson	TX	1972	2008	2018	Public	VI	BMD
197	The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston	Houston	TX	1973	2000	2010	Public	VI	BMD
198	The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio	San Antonio	TX	1973	2008	2018	Public	V	BMD
199	The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston	Galveston	TX	1973	2008	2018	Public	V	BMD

200	The University of Texas of the Permian Basin	Odessa	TX	1975	2000	2010	Public	III	BM
201	The University of Texas at San Antonio	San Antonio	TX	1974	2000	2010	Public	VI	BMD
202	The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas	Dallas	TX	1973	2009	2019	Public	VI	BMD
203	The University of Texas at Tyler	Tyler	TX	1974	2000	2010	Public	V	BMD
204	The University of West Alabama	Livingston	AL	1938	2002	2013	Public	IV	ABMES
205	Valdosta State University	Valdosta	GA	1929	2000	2010	Public	V	ABMESD
206	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Blacksburg	VA	1923	1998	2010	Public	VI	ABMD
207	Virginia State University	Petersburg	VA	1933	2008	2018	Public	V	BMD
208	Virginia Union University	Richmond	VA	1935	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD
209	Warner University	Lake Wales	FL	1977	2003	2012	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
210	Washington and Lee University	Lexington	VA	1895	2009	2019	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BD
211	Wayland Baptist University	Plainview	TX	1956	2008	2018	Private, Not-for-profit	III	ABM
212	William Carey University	Hattiesburg	MS	1958	1999	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMESD
213	Winston-Salem State University	Winston-Salem	NC	1947	2000	2010	Public	III	BM
214	Winthrop University	Rock Hill	SC	1923	2001	2011	Public	IV	BMES
215	Xavier University of Louisiana	New Orleans	LA	1938	2000	2010	Private, Not-for-profit	V	BMD

APPENDIX 5: LETTER FROM SACS COC TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION



SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

1866 Southern Lane • Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

Telephone 404/679-4500 Fax 404/679-4558

www.sacscoc.org

January 28, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Institutional Accreditation Liaisons, Levels III-VI

FROM: Tom E. Benberg, Ed.D., Vice President/Chief of Staff

RE: Participation in dissertation study about Accreditation Liaisons

Colleagues,

I am writing to encourage you to participate in the dissertation study of Ms. Tracy Molidor, Vice President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, Our Lady of the Lake College, Baton Rouge, LA. She is in the doctoral program at LSU and the focus of her study is on the institutional Accreditation Liaison. We believe the results of her study may be of benefit to both the Commission and to Accreditation Liaisons.

If you would grant me permission to forward to Ms. Molidor your e-mail address then she can proceed to select the institutions she wants to complete a survey form for her study. Please let me know by Wednesday, February 2, 2011 if you are willing to participate. If you are no longer serving as the institutional Accreditation Liaison, please forward this e-mail to the appropriate person. Note that Ms. Molidor has signed an appropriate confidentiality agreement with the Commission.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please direct your response to anapper@sacscoc.org, Administrative Assistant.

APPENDIX 6: ON-LINE SURVEY (QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION)

CONSENT SCRIPT FOR COVER LETTER (EMAIL WITH LINK TO SURVEY)

I am a SACS Accreditation Liaison (AL) and I am completing my doctoral studies. I have been a professional in higher education for 20 years and, after 3 years as an AL, I am very interested in the dynamics involved in the role. My dissertation research is an exploratory mixed-methods study of the characteristics of the professionals who fill the AL role and factors that support or challenge them as they carry out their responsibilities.

Believe me—I understand and appreciate your time limitations. With this e-mail, I am asking for your participation in one or both phases of my data collection process. First, I would sincerely appreciate your completion of an anonymous web-based survey (<link>). The survey will take approximately **15 minutes**.

As you submit the survey, you will have the option of entering your e-mail address if you also are interested in participating in the second phase of the study. Qualitative data will be collected as a way to strengthen and humanize quantitative findings. The second phase of the study will involve a confidential phone interview of about **20 minutes**, at your convenience.

Your participation is completely VOLUNTARY and you can decide at any time not to participate in this study. I also respect the privacy required for you to respond candidly. Please be assured your responses to this on-line survey are ANONYMOUS. The software being used is managed by a third-party vendor. I have no way of identifying the source of each response, unless you choose to participate in the second phase of the study. The phone interviews will be STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant, please contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board Chair, Louisiana State University, 225-578-8692 or irb@lsu.edu.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this project: sacsliaisonstudy@gmail.com. If you cannot access the survey, try cutting and pasting the link into the address bar of your web browser. Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey.

Kind and Collegial Regards,

Tracy Molitor

INTRODUCTION (FIRST PAGE OF SURVEY LINK)

Thank you very much – sincerely – for your participation in this study. The researcher understands and appreciates your time limitations.

As one of your fellow SACS Accreditation Liaisons, she also respects the privacy required for you to respond candidly. Please be assured your responses to this on-line survey are anonymous. The results of this study will be presented in aggregate only. The software being used is managed by a third-party vendor. The researcher has no way of identifying the source of each response, unless you choose to participate in the second phase of the study, which will be described as you submit your response.

Your participation is completely VOLUNTARY and you can decide at any time not to participate in this study. If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant, please contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board Chair, Louisiana State University, 225-578-8692 or irb@lsu.edu. Please feel free to contact the researcher directly if you have any questions about this project: sacsliaisonstudy@gmail.com.

This study seeks to

- Explore the characteristics of the professionals who fill the Accreditation Liaison role, and
- Understand factors that support or challenge liaisons.

The overarching purpose of this study is to increase support for Accreditation Liaisons.

This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

ABOUT YOUR INSTITUTION

Is your institution: Public/Private

Is your institution: Level III/Level IV/Level V/Level VI

What is your institution's enrollment? 0-5,000/5,001-10,000/10,001-15,000/15,001-20,000/20,001>

ALL ABOUT YOU—THE ACCREDITATION LIAISON

Do you report directly to the Chief Executive Officer of your institution? Yes/No

(If respondent answers no: To what position within your institution do you report? _____)

What is the level of your highest academic degree? Bachelor's/Master's/Educational Specialist/Doctorate

Are you a Senior Faculty Member (Associate or Full Professor)/Senior Administrator (Executive Director or Higher)/Other _____?

What is your official institutional title? _____

Are you tenured? Yes/No

(If respondent answers no: Does your institution offer tenure: Yes/No Are you in a tenure-track position? Yes/No)

By what method did you attain your appointment/position as Accreditation Liaison? Appointment/Application

(If respondent answers appointment: Did you want to be the Accreditation Liaison? Yes/No)

If you had a choice now, would you continue as Accreditation Liaison? Yes/No

Do you have responsibility in areas for which you do not have authority? Yes/No

(If respondent answers yes: Please list/explain areas in which you have responsibility but no authority.)

Gender: Female/Male

Are you Hispanic/Latino(a) Yes/No

Ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native/Asian/Black or African American/Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander/White

How many years have you been a professional in higher education? _____

In which of the following areas does your professional background in higher education fit? Academic Affairs (including teaching)/Student Affairs/Administration/Other _____

How many years have you spent working in academic affairs (including teaching)? _____

How many years have you spent working in student services? _____

How many years have you spent working in higher education administration? _____

How many years have you spent working in areas of higher education other than academic affairs, student services, and/or administration? _____

How many years have you been employed with your current institution? _____

Did you have experience as an Accreditation Liaison before your current position? Yes/No

(If respondent answers yes: Was it a SACS institution? Yes/No)

How many years did you serve as Accreditation Liaison in that position? _____

How long have you been your current institution's Accreditation Liaison? _____

What are your primary responsibilities within your institution (including accreditation)? Please list up to five broad areas, such as academic affairs, teaching, student services, institutional research, budget/finance, etc.). _/_/_/_/_

Do you feel personally accountable for the documents you sign and submit to SACS? Yes/No

When you sign documents for submission to SACS, are you always certain of the content/data accuracy? Yes/No

When you sign documents for submission to SACS, are you always certain the documents have been prepared with integrity? Yes/No

Please answer the two questions below by clicking "Yes" or "No" for each area listed on the right.

I have had professional development in this area since I became an Accreditation Liaison.

Yes	No	Accreditation
Yes	No	Strategic Planning
Yes	No	Institutional Assessment
Yes	No	Program Assessment
Yes	No	Institutional Effectiveness
Yes	No	Institutional Research

	Yes	No	Budget/Finance
	Yes	No	Change Management
	Yes	No	Organizational Development
	Yes	No	Project Management
I need or want more professional development in this area so I can become a more effective Accreditation Liaison.	Yes	No	Accreditation
	Yes	No	Strategic Planning
	Yes	No	Institutional Assessment
	Yes	No	Program Assessment
	Yes	No	Institutional Effectiveness
	Yes	No	Institutional Research
	Yes	No	Budget/Finance
	Yes	No	Change Management
	Yes	No	Organizational Development
	Yes	No	Project Management

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CARRYING OUT SACS-SPECIFIED ACCREDITATION LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES

Scale: 0 = Never Challenging; 1 = Sometimes Challenging; 2 = Often Challenging; 3 = Always Challenging; 4 = I have not done this

9. Ensuring that compliance with accreditation requirements is incorporated into the planning and evaluation process of the institution.
10. Notifying the Commission in advance of substantive changes and program developments in accord with the substantive change policies of the Commission.
11. Familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the Commission's accrediting policies and procedures, and with particular sections of the accrediting standards and Commission policies that have application to certain aspects of the campus (e.g., library, continuing education) especially when such documents are adopted or revised.
12. Serving as a contact person for Commission staff. This includes encouraging institutional staff to route routine inquiries about the *Principles of Accreditation* and accreditation policies and processes through the Accreditation Liaison, who will contact Commission staff, if necessary, and ensuring that e-mail from the Commission office does not get trapped in the institution's spam filter.
13. Coordinating the preparation of the annual profiles and any other reports requested by the Commission.
14. Serving as a resource person during the decennial review process and helping prepare for and coordinating reaffirmation and other accrediting visits.
15. Ensuring that electronic institutional data collected by the Commission is accurate and timely.
16. Maintaining a file of all accreditation materials, such as reports related to the decennial review; accreditation committee reports; accreditation manuals, standards, and policies; schedules of all visits; and correspondence from accrediting offices.

YOUR PREPARATION FOR YOUR ROLE AS ACCREDITATION LIAISON

How often, generally, do you visit the SACS COC Website? Weekly/Bi-Weekly/Monthly/Quarterly/Three or Fewer Times per Year/Never

How often, generally, do you contact your Commission staff member? Bi-Weekly/Monthly/Quarterly/Three or Fewer Times per Year/Never

Have you participated in a Substantive Change Drive-in Workshop? Yes/No

How many times have you attended SACS' Annual Meeting? _____

Will you attend the next Annual Meeting? Yes/Probably/Probably Not/No

How many times have you attended SACS' Quality Enhancement and Accreditation (Summer) Institute? _____

On how many on-site review committees have you served as a peer evaluator? _____

On how many off-site review committees have you served as a peer evaluator? _____

To what extent have you become acquainted with your institution's accreditation history by reviewing past correspondence with the Commission and materials stemming from previous reaffirmation or substantive change reviews? Not at All/A Little/As Needed/More Than Needed/These Documents Were Not Available to Me

Do you ensure reports to the Commission and significant correspondence from the Commission are archived for future reference? Yes/No

(If respondent answers no: Does your institution's chief executive officer ensure reports to the Commission and significant correspondence from the Commission are archived for future reference? Yes/No)

As Accreditation Liaison, do you perceive your role as that of a coordinator or as someone responsible for making sure all SACS requirements are met? Coordinator/Responsible Party/Both

CLOSING

The researcher would greatly appreciate your participation in a completely confidential interview. The purpose of the interview is twofold: 1) to better understand some of your responses in this survey; and 2) to explore some of the forces you think support and/or hinder your role as Accreditation Liaison.

If you would be willing to participate in a phone interview of about 20 minutes, at your convenience, please enter your e-mail address below. Again, your identity and your individual responses will be strictly confidential. Approximately 12 individuals will be interviewed.

By entering my contact information below, I understand the researcher may e-mail or call me to set up a phone interview.

Name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Preferred Phone Number: _____

Thanks again for your assistance with this study!

APPENDIX 7: TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION)

CONSENT SCRIPT FOR BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW

I would like to start by telling me how much I appreciate your time and participation in this voluntary study. Please remember your responses will remain strictly confidential. If it is okay with you, may I have your permission to digitally record our conversation so I can pay more attention to what you're saying than taking notes? [If "yes": "thank you very much." If "no": I understand completely, that's no problem at all.]

As a reminder, the purpose of the interview is to 1) better understand some of your responses in this survey; and 2) explore some of the forces you think support and/or hinder your role as Accreditation Liaison.

The overarching purpose of this study is to increase support for Accreditation Liaisons.

Out of respect for your time, let's go ahead and get started.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Question(s) that emerged from the quantitative phase of the study.
2. In the on-line survey, you indicated you perceive your role as Accreditation Liaison to be a coordinator/someone responsible for making sure all SACS requirements are met. Please tell me what you meant by your response.
3. In the on-line survey, you indicated you do/do not feel personally accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the documents you sign and send to SACS. Please elaborate on your response.
4. What are the driving forces, or ways you are supported, in your position?
5. What are the blocking forces, or challenges, you encounter carrying out your responsibilities? How do you think these could be overcome?
6. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important to consider as I move forward exploring the liaison role? If so, please explain.

CLOSING

Thanks again for your time and assistance with this study!

APPENDIX 8: OFFICIAL TITLES OF ACCREDITATION LIAISONS

	n
Vice President for Academic Affairs	14
Associate Provost	8
Assistant Provost	7
Professor	7
Provost	5
Director of Institutional Research	4
Vice President	4
Assistant Vice President	3
Associate Vice President	3
Director of Institutional Effectiveness	3
Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness	3
Executive Vice President	3
Dean of Research, Assessment, and Planning	2
Senior Vice Chancellor	2
Senior Vice President	2
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	2
Vice President and Dean	2
Vice Provost	2
Accreditation Liaison	1
Assistant Provost, Institutional Effectiveness	1
Assistant to the President for Strategy	1
Assistant Vice Chancellor, Planning and Effectiveness	1
Assistant Vice President and Library Director	1
Assistant Vice President, Institutional Compliance	1
Assistant Vice Provost	1
Associate Dean	1
Associate Dean for Academic Administration	1
Associate Dean for Seminary Effectiveness	1
Associate Director, Strategy and Measurement	1
Associate Provost for Student Success and Assessment	1
Associate Vice President and Director	1
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs	1
Associate Vice Provost	1
Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs	1
Assistant to University Provost for Special Initiatives	1

Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness	1
Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness	1
Chief Academic Officer	1
Chief Operations Officer	1
Dean	1
Dean for Academic Affairs	1
Dean of Institutional Research, Registrar, Associate Dean of the College	1
Dean, Institutional Research	1
Director and SACS Liaison	1
Director of Academic Assessment	1
Director of Institutional Assessment	1
Director of Institutional Assessment and Compliance	1
Director of Institutional Research and Academic Administration	1
Director of Institutional Research/Special Assistant to the President/	1
Director of University Planning/Accreditation Liaison	1
Director, Doctor of Education Program	1
Executive Vice President and Provost	1
Executive Director, Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness	1
Executive Assistant to the President	1
Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness	1
Executive Vice President for External Relations	1
Library Director	1
Special Assistant to the SVPAA/ Institutional Effect. Coordinator	1
Vice President for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness	1
Vice President for Enrollment	1
Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness	1
Vice President for Planning, Institutional Research, and Assessment	1
Vice President for Strategic Services	1
Vice President for Strategy, Planning, and Policy	1
Vice President-External Campuses and Graduate Studies	1
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs/Assistant to President	1
Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness	1
Vice Provost for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness	1
Vice President for Administration	1
Total	127

Note. Four participants did not respond to this question.

APPENDIX 9: AL COMMENTS REGARDING RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT AUTHORITY

1. Institutional effectiveness compliance; Policy and procedure development; Federal/state compliance
2. I oversee and manage curriculum at the University via our Banner Student System and the University Catalog. My role is to assure faculty governance of curriculum, however, I have no direct authority.
3. This is difficult to answer. As a SACS liaison who is on the administrative side of the institution, rather than the academic side, most of what I feel responsible for is outside of my authority. I consider the liaison responsible for ensuring compliance with SACS requirements, standards, and policies that fall across different categories of governance, IE, educational programs, finance and so forth. And I am not directly responsible for any of these. Even though I do have responsibility for IE, I still must rely on the organizational unit members and their leaders to take our planning and assessment activities seriously and follow through. The one area over which I do have considerable authority is preparing the annual profiles that we submit. I hope I am answering your question.
4. I review all curriculum committee action items (graduate and undergraduate) to ensure compliance with our state Commission on Higher Education as well as SACS. I work with faculty in seeking Board of Trustee approvals for new degree programs and program terminations. I also serve as a liaison to a Board committee. Two units report directly to me: Office of Assessment and Office of Institutional Effectiveness
5. academic outcomes assessment—influence but no authority
6. all areas other than academics or student affairs
7. I only have authority in academics, so I don't have authority in student development, IR, business and finance, etc.
8. I report to both the President and to the Provost. I have authority over my office personnel and chair key university curriculum committees. All of these are subject to other committee reviews. In a shared governance environment, it's a difficult question to answer in the abstract.
9. As accreditation liaison, I am responsible for assuring compliance by persons who do not answer to me (i.e., over whom I have no authority). Substantive change compliance offers the greatest challenge at the present time.
10. Planning; New Programs/Degrees; Enforcing Guidelines/Policies; Obtaining needed data
11. My role is advisory to my superiors, but my job as liaison is to keep the institution in compliance with all SACS criteria. I have to use persuasion rather than direct authority to influence changes needed to keep us in compliance.

12. Financial affairs, student services
13. I do not have any direct responsibility except for the classes in my department that I teach.
14. Responsible for coordinating the course evaluation process as well as program assessment—I have more of a consultative role with the Provost having more of an enforcement role.
15. No authority to make areas conform to compliance requirements
16. Pretty much everything!
17. Right now (2010-11) I am a faculty member and Director of Academic Assessment. Next year I am moving into a new interim admin-only position (out of faculty) to be called something like: Associate Dean for Institutional Effectiveness. I currently have no authority over student life, physical plant, financial/business affairs, admissions, marketing/advancement...only faculty. Next year this will change, however I am expecting to struggle with 'authority' as I will not have authority over any of the senior administrators/vice presidents.
18. I feel responsible for all areas of SACS compliance yet have little authority over anything beyond providing data and helping others collect data. I don't even have authority over whether they use the data. I have no units under me, am not on the senior management team and the only supervisory authority I have is for my office staff.
19. By the org chart, I am an associate dean. Many of my responsibilities involve institutional planning and assessment. This means that I am regularly asking vice presidents and the dean to do things (e.g., create new forms of assessment) or write reports (e.g., accreditation compliance documents) even though 'I am not the boss of them.'
20. institutional effectiveness /assessment
21. Risk Assessment
22. I am responsible for the efficacy of the planning process, but I am not a member of Senior Leadership which has the greatest influence on annual institutional priorities.
23. Assessment and institutional effectiveness
24. Scholarship web site, curriculum, faculty governance
25. Budgeting
26. All of them – including Program/Department Assessment, Program Reviews, SACS preparation
27. For example – Assessment in areas of the University except for Academics. I can suggest and advise, but have no authority to make sure it is done

28. program assessment
29. I am not sure I would describe it in this way. Because I have the president's authority behind me, I essentially have all the authority I need. I am also the elected assistant secretary to the Board of Trustees, and this association lends additional weight. However, I do not directly supervise any of the people whose cooperation is essential in matters of institutional effectiveness or in preparing the various reports and certifications necessary for SACS. I function by prodding, encouraging, and generally seeking cooperation from others. It actually works better than it might sound.
30. Areas outside of the provost's office (finance, student affairs, etc.)
31. Responsibility to ensure compliance with requirements and standards, but no authority to directly address most issues. Must advise, recommend, remind and foretell doom.
32. Completion of continuous improvement activities.
33. I can point out where we meet or do not meet accreditation standards; others must take action, if needed to address any deficiencies that creep in. I'm not actually responsible for correcting those things - it just often feels as though it is my responsibility to keep us in compliance.
34. I have responsibility for ensuring that the University is in compliance with the standards; but no authority to direct specific persons to do things required for compliance. Such authority is housed in the Office of the Provost. I merely convey to the Provost that attention needs to be directed to this and that. Of course, this assumes that problematic areas come to my attention.
35. Academic units implement programs and activities which are subject to SACS standards. While I offer guidance into issues that need to be taken into account related to accreditation, I do not have authority related to academic decisions. An example is substantive change where I have responsibility for reporting such changes to SACS but academic units make decisions about implementing on-line programs.
36. Distance Learning, Project Development, Student Support Services
37. Admission, International Initiatives and Support Services, Institutional Research, Government Appropriations and Liaison, Marketing and Promotion, Law School
38. I have responsibility to report substantive curricular changes, but I do not participate in committees that discuss or approve the curriculum such as Curriculum Council or Council of Deans
39. I manage the SACS reaffirmation process which includes all aspects of the institution but my authority is over the academic areas of the College.
40. I have no responsibility for student affairs, business affairs or intercollegiate athletics.

41. Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, Physical Plant, University Police, Student Services
42. There are too many to list but the most significant is the general area of decision support--data collection/reporting etc. This is so critical to SACS compliance but a different executive sets the priorities.
43. Coordinating the reaffirmation, keeping the university current in respect to SACS depends on persistence and persuasion, not formal institutional authority.
44. Various projects, reporting that require cooperation of others not under my direct supervision
45. Everyone in academic domain lacks authority over individual faculty but still has to bear the brunt of decision they make
46. Academics, Student Life, Faculty, etc., I don't have authority, but the VPAA has most of the authority, so I don't have any difficulty with compliance. My institution is very small and everyone cooperated, but that was less due to my authority and more due to relationships.
47. I am responsible for compliance with substantive change, but decisions about change are made by vice presidents and directors. I have no authority to impact whether or not change occurs, regardless of whether the change will put the institution out of compliance with SACS policies.
48. Run the institutional effectiveness program, but many of the folks who must do the IE are at higher levels than I in the organizational chart.
49. Extension education: oversee licensure but not consulted on long-term planning or quality control; new degree programs: responsible for drafting substantive change policies but not involved in developing learning outcomes/measures
50. Compliance of Distance Education Programs, Compliance of Institutional Strategic Plan
51. Clean, error-free data being entered into the system; Having to ensure that all faculty and staff complete assessment plans, etc. annually; Faculty qualifications--too many hired not meeting requirements and I can't do anything about it; Gen Ed Assessment--lots of apathy and faculty resistance
52. Compliance with IE for administrative/financial areas
53. Space planning; admissions; many HR-related restrictions that prohibit managers from handling HR matters without consultation and approval.
54. Institutional Effectiveness applies to all aspects of a University, not just academics. I am responsible for ensuring that non-academic units complete effectiveness planning and

assessment but must use the authority of others (Chief of Staff, President) to make it happen.

55. Academic planning and Community Engagement
56. Program Review, Institutional Effectiveness
57. finance issues
58. Faculty, Business Affairs
59. Faculty compliance with IE and accreditation issues. Staff management and oversight with limited direct supervisory authority.
60. Ensuring compliance with SACS requirements but no authority to implement changes/do work or tell someone what to do. E.g. I report to the VP for academic affairs but need to ensure actions are taken in a different division such as student affairs or business under another VP.
61. I assume that you mean IE responsibility for other offices which report to other EVPs but with which I must work to get their documentation.
62. Assessment of all academic programs, the core curriculum, and all university service units.
63. Responsible for monitoring areas such as assessment and reporting of substantive change but I have no authority over individuals who work in these areas. Responsible for ensuring that certain processes are followed so that we remain compliant but the individuals that have the authority to maintain compliance do not report to me in any way.
64. I may see areas that are not in compliance, but I have no direct authority to bring them into compliance. I must appeal to the Provost, who often must appeal to the President, for direction to bring things into compliance.
65. Authority for most aspects of SACS Principles is vested in others: President, CFO, Deans, Faculty, etc. Institutional Effectiveness staff report to me, but we utilize relational skills to accomplish our work.
66. Student Services, Finance and Operations, Enrollment Management--which are not under Academic Affairs (my area).
67. Justification of Faculty Qualifications; Budget Processes and Parameters; Strategic Planning and Timeline Development

APPENDIX 10: AL STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING BLOCKING FORCES

Interviewees were asked what types of strategies they had used to overcome some of the challenges they had faced over time and what they thought it would take to overcome contemporary blocking forces. Strategies employed that reduced challenges included using persuasion and focusing on the greater good of the institution; putting systems in place for ensuring accreditation requirements are met and documented; training others in the institution; building internal capacity around assessment; relying on good communication and teamwork; engaging the support of others with more authority; and, increasing professional development and networks for ALs.

Persuasion/Greater Good

A big part of the job is persuading others in the institution to do what you need them to do. Do you ever feel as though you are pushing or pulling faculty and other administrators along? “Of course. That’s part of the job . . . an important thing to do and you need to be vigilant consistently on it” (Case 105).

Sometimes the persuasion has to be negative, focusing on negative consequences for not doing what needs to be done.

But so all these rules and criteria and so forth, there’s good reason for them. And they make the school a better school. So, and that’s kind of what I preach that we’re going to be better off for all of it. [TM: So in terms of your switch in your mindset, do you think that it had to do with learning more about accreditation and about why some of the policies and procedures are in place?] Yeah I think there’s a learning curve. And it just happens through practice and the like.

“Some of it is good will, because they know that I want to do this for the right reasons. I don’t tell them to do reports just for the sake of reports” (Case 38).

And their disciplinary associations are starting to tell them assessment is important so they know. They know at other colleges what’s happening. They hear it in their meetings that it’s happening.

“I have to keep working with the deans and the VP or the president to strengthen that message. It does help to report to the president. I think it would be problematic to report to anybody else and maybe eventually I would sit on senior

management team but in the meantime, just having more discussions with those top administrators and working with them because half the time they don't really understand is the problem. They need to be educated too and I don't think I fully appreciated or realized that when I started here—how much I needed to be educating them as well. I kind of assumed . . . [but] . . . they didn't fully understand assessment. I kind of assumed that, if it was part of their job, they would try to understand it in order to help their faculty or staff but that wasn't the case. So I need to work harder at that end.” (Case 38)

And, so sometimes change does not come that easy. And as you mentioned that comes with a lot of challenges. But challenge is a part of our life. There's no such job as no challenge so we can identify and prioritize those challenges and see what we can do first to achieve success. The key I would like to encourage people, not to just identify those big tasks first. You can identify it by small tasks so people have obtained some success that are agreed together and we appreciate their success considerably and also reward their success. Bit by bit small success becomes big success and that's how a university can work on to a next stage and accreditation is one of those.

#105: [Yeah, I can see that working. That's a really nice link between program accreditation and institutional accreditation.] Well in our viewpoint accreditation is accreditation. And if you want to – I choose to take the same philosophy that Linda Suskie does. The departments through the disciplines are doing what they're supposed to do. All we have to do is capture it in ways that are acceptable for the accrediting bodies and by being involved with these folks within their disciplines we make sure that they have the tools that they need to follow up for the university-wide accreditation.

#85: You know, I always tell people, “Well if this isn't going to be meaningful for you at all then we're not going to do it and we will figure out what is meaningful to you.” Therefore, I try to make it very personalized for a department, for a particular discipline and help them get to the point to where they understand or they can focus in on something that would be helpful for them; then it starts to click. Oh yeah, well this is what you're wanting, what they're asking us to do and it tends to work out. I'm not saying everybody's a convert and some people do it just because they have to do it. But we're making some progress I think and kind of developing a culture of assessment and obviously it still is, even though I would prefer it not to be but it is still associated with SACS.

#116: And that's a challenge to kind of get them out of that and start thinking about – well, actually this could tell us something about what we should do in the curriculum. Now they don't ignore it entirely but it's still sufficiently new that some kind of requirement or something imposable from outside rather than something that's generated within.

Putting Systems in Place/Building Internal Capacity

- #80: And so my point here is, maybe a little self-bragging but if any university takes quality assurance, as part of their commitment; I call it quality assurance; as part of their commitment the university will grow no matter how difficult that will be. Okay. And I'm not saying, when I first came I was given the self-study results. There were 447 issues to improve and two years later when we had the visiting team come, as I said again, we have only small minor, very minor, not additional things but one small change. We changed one computer science teacher from teaching seniors to teach the juniors. Okay. And so in other words we won't have a zero base fault system here. And how do we know that? Because we keep on doing our own self, I call it frequent monitoring, you can use that term. Okay. It's a term that I use here every day. Okay. Everything we do from a new program proposal to a program outcome assessment. We base ourselves on how those accreditation criteria should be and then go beyond that. It's not a pain in the neck anymore I tell you.
- #51: One of the things that I've tried to do over the years is to get a diversified assessment program. So, I have a little assessment handbook that I developed for myself primarily, which looks at the ways that we can document that we are doing as good a job as we can. That's everything from student evaluation of courses system to an annual evaluation of faculty by the deans. Some of these are just kind of routine things that everybody ought to do. Probably do – to using a good collection departmentally generated assessment systems; to a process where each year we take two departments and ask them to do a self-study comparing themselves to other departments in our region, maybe three of them. And then we bring an outside evaluator in for a program review. This year we are doing history of politics and foreign languages and we've just had the history of politics external evaluator on campus.
- #51: We use a certain amount of what are now pretty standard, well-developed assessment instruments. I'm saying a lot, but what I'm really saying encapsulated that is I think that you make assessment work not just by having a big assessment office someplace. Instead you get that infused in faculty and departments and have a diversified approach where student evaluation, the evaluation of faculty by administrators, self-studies for selective departments, standardized tests, like the BCSSE and the NSSE, give QEP assessment. You add all things up and it gives you a pretty, not only diversified, but healthy approach toward assessment that becomes endemic to the academic enterprise; not something just imposed from outside and above.
- #51: Yeah, organic, part of the process, even things like making sure that any time new courses are proposed and we just seem to be proposed new courses left and right that syllabi of requirements include a careful attention to how are you going to assess the outcomes? You've got to have clear outcomes established on your syllabus and then you assess it and then the curriculum committee, a host of individual faculty accountable for having an assessment system within each course that they can defend. Those kinds of things become organic because they become just institutionalized aspects of the whole process of teaching and learning.

- #38: Now we have a supervisor review process where the supervisor reviews and in the end after those reviews go to assessment so a management team discusses them and the budget office requires that they support their request for raises with information from their continuous improvement reports. However, even though I train everybody I can to put things in place it will all fall down if it is not strengthened at the top and pretty quickly because they'll do it and they'll believe that we're working to change toward that but if they don't see it because they've been there before. Before I came, they were told we had to do these reports and they are important and they saw they were just sitting on the shelf and they weren't important, so they stopped. And that [could] will happen again. I made some changes that that will happen again unless there's a really strong message I think from the top, at some point.
- #72: We decided to do a briefing book just for the site and we pulled out a whole bunch of the principles that we thought were most applicable to that program. It was like a mini-compliance report outlining the principle and what we did on campus and then how that was applied, or how we complied with that principle at this off-campus site and I think it really – that was my idea.
- #80: Oh, yes. I have established an institutional office called academic compliance office . . . ongoing, every week . . . staff highly respected by all the deans and provost's office [personnel]. Our compliance office staff is involved in decision making policy committees.
- #80: So we don't have a living nightmare. As I said again, in this university, Tracy, accreditation is part of our life now. We just do it as part of our university life. We don't do it because of the business and all that stuff, we don't do it because we're required by QEP. We don't do it because we have to submit the applications for this and that. We do it because we do it as a part of our system, or monitoring our own progress or excellence. And that's why in eleven years I've seen this university coming from nowhere, now we are actually rated number [x] best in the South.
- #105: . . . and we have an environment and we have defined an escalation plan. I ask for someone and give them a deadline. If they don't comply, I ask again and copy my boss who's the vice-president of academic affairs. If they don't comply again then they get a third request with a copy to the vice-president of academic affairs and the president.
- #105: And they come in, they work as assessment director for one course release and a stipend. And they get sent to the big assessment conferences. They get the opportunity to submit proposals with us for the annual SACS meeting. They go to the summer institute. We sent one to the North Carolina Assessment institute and to IUPUI Assessment Institute and we take people from a variety of disciplines. We had one for two years from sociology. We have one who is currently finishing up her two year term from math and computer science and we've got to call out now for the next one. And the person who's bid is selected is in one of the natural sciences and he'll serve for two years. And that's our approach to growing our own expertise among the faculty so that they work with us

for a couple of years in conjunction with the courses they teach and when they're finished with us they go back to their departments and they have the assessment knowledge. So if we can, you know, get one faculty member at a time to have a fairly thorough and deep understanding of assessment they can talk about it intelligently with their fellow faculty members. They apply. We send out a call and they apply. Well, we ask for people who have been at the university at least three years in a faculty position. We train them. And it's about building institutional capability more than anything else. So honestly the selection process is – I'm going to use a strange term I suppose, practically political. I make it very clear that one course release means 10 hours a week. Because you know, if, if you've got a four-four load as your standard which our institution does then if your course load drops by 25% then you can spend 25% of the work week working for us in assessment. And that was something that I had to lay out very clearly. But the last time we did our call we had five applicants and I ranked my choices and I went to the vice-president of academic affairs and that person weeded out a couple because the V.P. thought those two applicants didn't have the kind of relationships with other faculty members that would encourage the other faculty members to work with them closely and listen to them.

#105: We try. It's also a whole lot cheaper than hiring a full-time person.

#126: What I've tried to do is to build in what we need to do into the stuff that they already have to do anyway.

#126: Yeah, but it's, you know, the credentialing we're trying to build that into what we're doing in Digital Measures so it's easy for them to just, you know, update their credentialing form if they're teaching a new class. We're trying to make assessment if we can, something that is not this monumental task once a year.

#72: I think the biggest challenge for any accreditation liaison is to keep the momentum up, and I think the heart of the process that we've established by ingraining it into the senior leadership group, I think is going to work for us because then it's never off anybody's radar screen, you know, even the deans are involved, the faculty senate president sits on that leadership, or the vice-president; whoever can come. The student government body president and the senior directors, the vice-chairs, which means administration and finance, external affairs, student affairs and myself, the chief academic officer and with that you have a group of people who are then inculcated doing actions with the importance of keeping up with this stuff and not letting it be either a decennial exercise or at the very most, a quinquennial exercise, you know, every five years they'll be scrambling around now, what's going on, okay.

#126: We do have an institutional effectiveness office that handles the assessment tools that are used to track learning outcomes. And there is an assistant director who is responsible for making sure that faculty and in all the colleges are using Weave On-line . . . that they're doing their assessment plans every year, and she actually has a matrix that she uses for assessing the quality of the assessment plans every year, and she does it not just for the

colleges but she also does it for all the administrative units on campus. So there is somebody who's kind of watching over all of that.

- #126: So that it's something that they're doing you know and they don't have to evaluate everything every year. They can do parts of it each year so that they don't have to feel like it's a huge burden. You know they have to do program reviews every five years that are more comprehensive but there has to be a way of making it so that it's not so intrusive, because they just feel like they were put through the ringer over the last two years. And because we had like a lot of stuff go because we had been through so many administrative changes-- a lot of things fell through the cracks.

Training Faculty

- #51: Part of my job is educating the faculty and putting before them the expectations of accreditation associations, it's frankly because so many of our programs now fall under some kind of accreditation. So I don't have to just every 10 years say, "Well, it's time to do SACS again." It's such an ongoing process everywhere in the college that it's not as hard a sell as it used to be.
- #24: A couple of years ago whereas we had to write up a policy and procedure that said this is how we're going to capture these things and then we could just go on the road and we would scare everybody to death and said you got to tell us when you're thinking about going on-line with a program. If it's not already in distance ed you need to let us know what's going on. I think just talking to a lot of people and making sure people understand they need to tell you. We'll probably do another road show this fall after we get our compliance certification and go back out and talk to all the department chairs. Cause really here at [this institution] our faculty really are the ones that come up with the new programs and the new innovations in terms of delivery of programs around which a lot of these substantive change types of things have to be reported. And so we just, you know, have to take the show on the road. Make sure the deans understand, in our organization, make sure the associate deans understand. A lot of stuff goes to the deans but we also try to meet informally with the associate deans who really carry out a lot of this and do a lot of the direct work with the department chairs. And then we talk to the department chairs at least once a year and say this is an example of something that occurred in your college that we had to report. So obviously and in the last year this has improved dramatically. Our distance ed folks call us up because they're, you know, thinking about something and we just keep a list of everything that could potentially be a substantive change. And we just track where they go over time.
- #26: We determined we needed to do a better job of program assessment, and so, I actually got the attention of some folks and we sent a team of three, including myself and two other faculty who have interest in and connections with SACS. Three of us went down to the Summer Institute and looked at QEP and quality assessment and all of that. We were able to make some changes in our program assessment process here at the institution before a team told us to, before the review committee told us to. So, by the time we rolled around

and submitted our compliance report and then received the reaffirmation, we were already in good shape in regard to program assessment.

#105: We have formal workshops, and we also have one-on-ones.

#116: Yeah, well we've done several training events where we really tried to first lay out what SACS is interested in and then, another one where we really focused on learning outcomes and kind of laying out the idea of goals and outcomes and then different ways of measuring indirect and direct and then assessment and then closing the circle. So we have done that over and over again. We have actually a form that was structured with all those parts in it and faculty departments complete those forms which try to kind of reinforce with them the topics and the elements of measuring learning outcomes. So, you know, we drill it in but the trend is to oftentimes to kind of see this as part of the accreditation process rather than part of curriculum or vision. I think that is kind of a natural thing. It's like having your parents look over your shoulder, even though they're doing things that you probably should do for your own good but because your parents are looking over your shoulder, you think of it more as what your parents are imposing rather than something you ought to be doing.

#105: But seriously another thing that we're doing, you know part cost containment and part cultural shift is we started bringing in administrative internship for faculty members the last two years.

#105: And then we have the professional development and when you're in the kind of budgetary environment in which we live, professional development is a really nice thing to give people.

#116: Yeah, once they catch on to it, I think they – it could be valuable in – well if you're teaching you start looking for those ways of measuring and then start actually looking at the measurements to see whether something's happening. It's just a two-way street though. The other – my main challenge sometimes is in interpreting facts to the faculty; one that was a really difficult one and I think it said something about the SACS process. I don't know how they change it exactly but it's a problem with the project. They want this quality enhancement plan, which is not a bad idea either but my school, for instance, was very concerned long before the QEP came on the horizon. We were concerned about theological students who come to the seminary with very little background in Bible or in theology. What do you do about them, how do you gear them up. We actually went out and developed a project where we got funding from an outside agency to do what we call, pre-matriculation curriculum to help students begin to start thinking theologically. Well we made the mistake of getting all that done a year before the team could come. So that can't count as the QEP at all.

Financial Support

- #105: We are in charge [financially]. We get a budget for SACS but all funding for all accreditation efforts within the discipline goes through my office so all of the deans have to work with me. All of the program coordinators have to work with me. And that's a really nice way to make sure that SACS is not considered an afterthought or annoyance. Because while people may not want to deal with SACS, academic units certainly want to make sure that everything goes smoothly for their accreditation efforts within their discipline. So we pay their dues to their disciplinary accrediting bodies, we are the ones that fund their travel to go to conferences and meetings for accreditation within their discipline. We are the ones that bring consultants on campus to assist them with their accreditation within the discipline. So, we support accreditation within the discipline that occurs pretty much constantly across the institution either for one discipline or another. So, last fall we sent six faculty members to an NCATE conference. We send our master's in public administration program coordinator to a meeting every year. We pay the nursing dues to NLNAC and it works.
- #105: [they're getting they're release plus a stipend] it's 8% of their annual salary. Yeah, it's, it's a sizable stipend. They also get a state of the art computer. We've been using power books. I don't know what the new one will want, but whatever computer he wants he'll get.
- #105: Plus you know if they write a paper that's about assessment we'll pay for their travel and their registration to go conference and present it, and that counts towards promotion and tenure.

Good Communication/Teamwork

- #72: In order for us to have a successful reaffirmation process, and it was successful – well we don't know until December officially but, you know, everybody in a senior leadership position, both on the academic side and on the administrative side and on student affairs needed to be aware of what the institution was saying in its compliance certification, in the focused report, preparing for the onsite visit, because when the team came, nobody didn't know this stuff. We did not have to go through a long involved process to “educate,” to educate people about what was in the compliance document, where the offsite committee had made recommendations, what the focused report said and what was expected of them in the onsite visit. We essentially did all that with the leadership team and we're preparing people for the onsite visits from day one.
- #72: Right. So she and I meet all the time, I mean, particularly now she is new and we're kind of getting things off to running here. She will report to the senior leadership team quarterly. And again, it's not because we want to annoy people about the QEP but we want to make sure that everybody knows where we're going, what the challenges are, did we have to regroup on anything we initially had said. You know, QEP's are an evolutionary process, right. You start doing stuff and things just don't work. [TM: That's a nice systematic way to do that.]

- #80: And sometimes we have to repeat the message many, many, many times. And they ask us to explain some situations many, many times repeatedly over times. Then you get the message out and also get them involved in participating in the whole process from the simple process of so called working together to high level policy decision making processes. So they know what are the reasons behind those strategic decisions that's been made and they become part of it. So they can define those decisions together and also interpret those decisions as part of their decisions. I think that's a very key, important key part in having the faculty and the staff to support the whole thing.
- #85: Well, I wouldn't say that; the strategies are basically – they're not well defined and strictly intentional. What we do is we tend to work with smaller groups of faculty on different things and so once you get people into smaller groups they actually start to have that more open conversation about, you know; a give and take and they can then see more of the benefit of it. I would say the strategy is that we work with people in smaller groups and we get – you find key people on campus who are – this has only happened because of the provost has her hand on the pulse of the faculty and she has been able to identify very key people tempering into the process and working under her, not her guidance but giving her blessing. We have worked with smaller groups of people. Once you start interacting with those, a few people then it just starts to grow because then those people become ambassadors, if you would, and actually even if they don't totally agree one hundred percent in everything that's going on, they are much more likely to at least stand up and say, "These are the reasons why we understand and so we're supportive." Yet, when they start converting their friends and colleagues too, because they understand what's happening and our approach to is then not to make the standards and like I said in particular institutional effectiveness, that's the one that I think most of us have issues with. We want to help people understand what we want to do is something that's beneficial to us not just in response to SACS.

Refer to Higher Authority

- #20: It's a position where any authority you have lies largely in the individual's ability to persuade and/or, you know, somehow create some kind of consensus.
- #24: [If we really need a push with faculty] we usually ask the president and the provost for support. There have been times where we basically drafted talking points for the president and the provost to shore up our authority in terms of getting this process done.
- #24: And, you know, the president and the provost annually go around and talk to each one of the academic departments. The president does the state of the university address. There are communications, you know, occasional communications from the provost and from the president. And if we get to a point where we're meeting some resistance, it might be me supporting my staff. I mean, when I'm out there working I will say things in support but if we get into a pickle we tend to take it to the top and let the folks, the leadership, you know, because everybody says you have to have leadership from the top on this. You're going to have trouble getting things to occur. And the provost on our recommendation had directed discussions about individual things.

- #29: I would think that probably the provost would maybe provide more support in my situation. Because so much of the sticky points for example, assessment has to do with a learning outcomes and academic programs. And for example, we have – our main school with the most students, our liberal arts school college arts and sciences. Well right now the dean, knowing that we need to do better in the learning outcomes arena, you might say. In every school they have their strengths and weaknesses in this area but our dean and I've spoken to her about a lot of what our challenges are; she's taken off with this in a big time way. She never even talked about accreditation she's talking about departments getting better by establishing learning outcomes for their majors and disciplines, that sort of thing. They're even creating a website.
- #80: [How do you get them to come along? Are you talking specifically about faculty or are these faculty and administrators?] Faculty and staff, it does not matter to me. The buy-in system is very important. That's why the leaders have to actually head them off and engage with them.
- #105: So we're in a situation where people have learned that we're not going to go away until they give us what we need. And if they don't give it to us they're going to have the president on their tail.

Professional Development & Network for Accreditation Liaisons

- #38: [Not gone to workshop for substantive change?] No, but I'm scheduled for the next one on the 11th or something. [What about the summer institute?] One of them – it's not that I don't like them, it's just that for the resources I'm not sure it's the best for me because there's so much, they're so focused on assessment and while I can always learn more about assessment that is an area that I know pretty well and I can pick up enough from the annual meeting.
- #38: There's no organization of professionals and while I probably could go to more of the assessment conference...I would love a professional organization in which I was going beyond that. I do need something but not just going to more conferences.
- #38: Yeah. It would be great to have a support network.
- #38: Let's see – I guess along with what you just said there's another interesting part of the job is it because you have to be involved in so many different areas, it also though keeps you looking at what are the trends in higher education and I think that's an interesting part. Always looking at what's coming up and how could this affect, you know, either the standards or just how higher education will look in the future. I think that's a really interesting part of it as well.
- #38: Something I've also noticed – I don't know if this is picked up in your research but it seems to me that there's not enough of us out there. It seems like I'm always seeing jobs and I, you know, and is that really the case? Is that really that there's a lot of places

having a hard time finding good – because you said it’s so hard to have all these skills and to find people with these skills.

- #72: . . . and I just think that it would be helpful, for example, I know there are people out there who have been accreditation liaisons for a long time. I think for accreditation liaisons it would be really helpful to have ways in which I think both people could get more liaison training advice from people who’ve done this work for a long time. What mine fields are out there that you don’t want to be sure to know that. Substantive change, I mean, everybody is completely paranoid about this.
- #72: At [professional organizations/conferences] there are often sessions especially for people who are new to the job and I think SACS might be well served in putting quite a bit more energy into that accreditation liaison role and frankly – let me say this, I think SACS misses an opportunity if they’re not using the accreditation liaison as a way to improve the accreditation process of their own teaching process improvement.
- #72: Exactly. You’re asking us, right, about asking our constituency and getting feedback and assessing ourselves, etc. I say, “Who Is assessing the assessors, you know?” But I do think that there is – and I’m not putting myself in this category but there are people who are doing this work who have a tremendous profession and I know the Board is supposed to do that and the Council and whatever their title is. But I think there are people who are not in those roles. There’s a handful people who have been accreditation liaisons of long-standing who I think could really give some great introspective to the organization on how things could be better, more effective, more efficient, I don’t know but it seems to me that is a resource that hasn’t been adequately tapped.
- #72: I actually think there ought to be more at the annual meeting for accreditation liaisons. A lot of people get asked to do this as I did. There’s basically no training you know, it’s like, “Okay, you’re the accreditation liaison.” Now sometimes that pushing is the IR person or somebody maybe who has been sort of involved in it but I am betting at the smaller institutions particularly – particularly if you have staff turnover. You have people who are coming in as accreditation liaisons who may or may not know the first thing about this. And I would think that just as a public service it would be incredibly helpful for SACS to do a little bit more than they do. I just had occasion because we put in a proposal for the December meeting just today, like now and I had occasion to go back through the program to our last year’s meeting for last year’s meeting in Kentucky. I went back to Atlanta because I couldn’t find my program book but I found my San Antonio program book but I couldn’t find the Atlanta ones. And then once you’re there, this is specifically for accreditation liaisons.
- #72: . . . I just think SACS could do better, you know, by kind of helping people out a little bit more, especially the new ones. I think that the accreditation liaison has an extremely important educational role on the campus. I know that my faculty and even my dean want to know more. They ask questions and I feel it’s my responsibility to be able to research;

if I don't know the answer and I often don't even now, it's my responsibility to go look and find the answer and bring it back to them so that we all know it, okay.

- #72: Right; so helping accreditation liaisons to know even what kinds of questions to ask periodically of the deans. For example; okay, your dean. Hey guys, what's happening? Tell me about this, okay. What do you have on the horizon in terms of program planning, okay? How do you judge whether or not the program is significantly different from programs offered at that location. So there are people out there who I am sure have done this work and I think there's better ways of doing it. I certainly now having done this for three years, would appreciate being able to share or at least hear about best and worst practices. Best practices are lessons learned I like to call them. From accreditation liaisons who have been there and know say, "You know what, we did this. This is the way we handled this particular thing." When our reaffirmation site visit came, this is how we handled this, or in our compliance certification, you know, we had these issues," or for substantive change or whatever it is. Opening a new site or whatever it is.
- #116: Yeah. Well actually I've learned a lot about learning but, you know, I've gone to the SACS conferences. I've found some of the workshops very kind of enlightening about thinking about different ways of measuring whether you're actually conveying what you hope to convey. I don't think that's a bad emphasis. I think probably both campuses could use – even if it was a video tape or something that was really well done that introduced learning outcomes of different kinds of measuring, particularly in areas like philosophy, or theology, or maybe literature or whatever. My experience within the previous place I was in was it helped actually to have the SACS or ATS staff person come to campus. It simply kind of bolstered the attention of the faculty on accreditation and if they're good it can open some eyes about this question of learning outcome. So I'm not opposed to the learning outcome assessment. The curious part again is the schedule. The QEP, they want it to be a meaningful enhancement plan but faulty enhancement doesn't always work on schedule and I think that's a major fault of the system. It's not a bad idea it just needs to be flexible enough for smaller schools that they don't have to come up with faulty enhancement in lock-step.
- #116: [It does, of course. I thought you'd have a somewhat unique perspective and you do. I think it's because of your institution type, where you are in the process with SACS and also the fact that you are a tenured faculty member.] [One other thing that I noted on your responses here is that you really are not interested in any more professional development] Well I don't think it's that complex to be honest with you. It is complex in terms of organization but the conferences, if you go to the conferences there's some actually pretty good workshops and some particular schools that are particularly good at it. So, I don't feel like I need additional beyond what SACS offers in the conference.

APPENDIX 11: THE PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION: FOUNDATIONS FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Principles	Responsibility AND Authority	
	CEO ^a	CAO ^b
1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters. (Integrity)	Yes	
2.1 The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies. (Degree-granting Authority)	Yes	
2.2 The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting members of the board are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution. A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board on which both the presiding officer and a majority of the other members are neither civilian employees of the military nor active/retired military. The board has broad and significant influence upon the institution's programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting board members are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution. (Governing Board)	Yes	
2.3 The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board. (Chief Executive Officer)	Yes	

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
2.4 The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service. (Institutional Mission)	Yes	
2.5 The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. (Institutional Effectiveness)	Yes	
2.6 The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs. (Continuous Operation)	Yes	
2.7		
2.7.1 The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification for all degrees that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit. (Program Length)		Yes
2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. (Program Content)		Yes

Principles	Responsibility AND Authority	
	CEO	CAO
2.7.3 In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification if it allows for fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit of general education courses. (General Education)		Yes
2.7.4 The institution provides instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. If the institution does not provide instruction for all such course work and (1) makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia or (2) uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In both cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. (Course work for Degrees)		Yes
2.8 The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs. Upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets the comprehensive standard for faculty qualifications. (Faculty)		Yes

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
2.9 The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. Collections, resources, and services are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs. (Learning Resources and Services)		Yes
2.10 The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students. (Student Support Services)		Yes
2.11		
<p>2.11.1 The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.</p> <p>The member institution provides the following financial statements: (1) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a system wide or statewide audit) and written institutional management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant and/or an appropriate governmental auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (2) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year; and (3) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board. Audit requirements for applicant institutions may be found in the Commission policy “Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions.” (Financial Resources)</p>	Yes	
2.11.2 The institution has adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. (Physical Resources)	Yes	

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. (Quality Enhancement Plan)		Yes
<i>3.1 Institutional Mission</i>		
3.1.1 The mission statement is current and comprehensive, accurately guides the institution's operations, is periodically reviewed and updated, is approved by the governing board, and is communicated to the institution's constituencies.(Mission)	Yes	
<i>3.2 Governance and Administration</i>		
3.2.1 The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and the periodic evaluation of the chief executive officer.(CEO evaluation/selection)	Yes	
3.2.2 The legal authority and operating control of the institution are clearly defined for the following areas within the institution's governance structure: (Governing board control)	Yes	
3.2.2.1 institution's mission;	Yes	
3.2.2.2 fiscal stability of the institution;	Yes	
3.2.2.3 institutional policy, including policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services; and	Yes	
3.2.2.4 related foundations (athletic, research, etc.) and other corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution and/or its programs.	Yes	
3.2.3 The board has a policy addressing conflict of interest for its members. (Board conflict of interest)	Yes	
3.2.4 The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious or other external bodies and protects the institution from such influence. (External influence)	Yes	

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.2.5 The governing board has a policy whereby members can be dismissed only for appropriate reasons and by a fair process.(Board dismissal)	Yes	
3.2.6 There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy. (Board/administration distinction)	Yes	
3.2.7 The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies. (Organizational structure)	Yes	
3.2.8 The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution. (Qualified administrative/academic officers)	Yes	
3.2.9 The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff. (Faculty/staff appointment)	Yes	
3.2.10 The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators on a periodic basis. (Administrative staff evaluations)	Yes	
3.2.11 The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for, and exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over, the institution's intercollegiate athletics program. (Control of intercollegiate athletics)	Yes	
3.2.12 The institution's chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities exclusive of institution-related foundations that are independent and separately incorporated. (Fund-raising activities)	Yes	
3.2.13 Any institution-related foundation not controlled by the institution has a contractual or other formal agreement that (1) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation and (2) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission. (Institution-related foundations)	Yes	

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.2.14 The institution's policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of all intellectual property. These policies apply to students, faculty, and staff.(Intellectual property rights)		Yes
<i>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)</i>		
3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes		Yes
3.3.1.2 administrative support services	Yes	
3.3.1.3 educational support services		Yes
3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate		Yes
3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate		Yes
3.3.2 The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (Quality Enhancement Plan)		Yes
3.4 Educational Programs: All Educational Programs (includes all on campus, off-campus, and distance learning programs and course work)		Yes
3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is approved by the faculty and the administration. (Academic program approval)		Yes
3.4.2 The institution's continuing education, outreach, and service programs are consistent with the institution's mission. (Continuing education/service programs)	Yes	

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.4.3 The institution publishes admissions policies that are consistent with its mission. (Admissions policies)		Yes
3.4.4 The institution has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures that course work and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution's own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript. (Acceptance of academic credit)		Yes
3.4.5 The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution. (Academic policies)		Yes
3.4.6 The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. (Practices for awarding credit)		Yes
3.4.7 The institution ensures the quality of educational programs and courses offered through consortial relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution. (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements)		Yes
3.4.8 The institution awards academic credit for course work taken on a noncredit basis only when there is documentation that the noncredit course work is equivalent to a designated credit experience. (Noncredit to credit)		Yes
3.4.9 The institution provides appropriate academic support services. (Academic support services)		Yes
3.4.10 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. (Responsibility for curriculum)		Yes

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.4.11 For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration. (Academic program coordination)		Yes
3.4.12 The institution's use of technology enhances student learning and is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs. Students have access to and training in the use of technology. (Technology use)		Yes
<i>3.5 Educational Programs: Undergraduate Programs</i>		
3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them. (College-level competencies)		Yes
3.5.2 At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. In the case of undergraduate degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns 25 percent of the credits required for the degree through instruction offered by the participating institutions. (Institutional credits for a degree)		Yes
3.5.3 The institution defines and publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. (Undergraduate program requirements)		Yes
3.5.4 At least 25 percent of the discipline course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding the terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate—in the discipline, or the equivalent of the terminal degree. (Terminal degrees of faculty)		Yes
<i>3.6 Educational Programs: Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs</i>		

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.6.1 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. (Post-baccalaureate program rigor)		Yes
3.6.2 The institution structures its graduate curricula (1) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (2) to ensure ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences. (Graduate curriculum)		Yes
3.6.3 The majority of credits toward a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. In the case of graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortial arrangements, the student earns a majority of credits through instruction offered by the participating institutions. (Institutional credits for a degree)		Yes
3.6.4 The institution defines and publishes requirements for its graduate and post-baccalaureate professional programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. (Post-baccalaureate program requirements)		Yes
<i>3.7 Faculty</i>		
3.7.1 The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty. (Faculty competence)		Yes

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
3.7.2 The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status. (Faculty evaluation)		Yes
3.7.3 The institution provides ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. (Faculty development)		Yes
3.7.4 The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom. (Academic freedom)		Yes
3.7.5 The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters. (Faculty role in governance)		Yes
<i>3.8 Library and Other Learning Resources</i>		
3.8.1 The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. Learning/information resources)		Yes
3.8.2 The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. (Instruction of library use)		Yes
3.8.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution. (Qualified staff)		Yes
<i>3.9 Student Affairs and Services</i>		
3.9.1 The institution publishes a clear and appropriate statement of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement to the campus community. (Student rights)		Yes
3.9.2 The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records and maintains special security measures to protect and back up data. (Student records)		Yes

	Responsibility AND Authority	
Principles	CEO	CAO
<i>3.10 Financial Resources</i>		
3.10.1 The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability. (Financial stability)	Yes	
3.10.2 The institution provides financial profile information on an annual basis and other measures of financial health as requested by the Commission. All information is presented accurately and appropriately and represents the total operation of the institution.(Submission of financial statements)	Yes	
3.10.3 The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations. (Financial aid audits)	Yes	
3.10.4 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. (Control of finances)	Yes	
3.10.5 The institution maintains financial control over externally funded or sponsored research and programs. (Control of sponsored research/external funds)	Yes	
<i>3.11 Physical Resources</i>		
3.11.1 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its physical resources. (Control of physical resources)	Yes	
3.11.2 The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community.(Institutional environment)	Yes	
3.11.3 The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that appropriately serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission related activities. (Physical facilities)	Yes	

	Authority AND Responsibility	
Principles	CEO	CAO
<p><i>3.12 Responsibility for compliance with the Commission's substantive change procedures and policy.</i></p> <p><i>The Commission on Colleges accredits the entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located or however they are delivered. Accreditation, specific to an institution, is based on conditions existing at the time of the most recent evaluation and is not transferable to other institutions or entities. When an accredited institution significantly modifies or expands its scope, changes the nature of its affiliation or its ownership, or merges with another institution, a substantive change review is required. The Commission is responsible for evaluating all substantive changes to assess the impact of the change on the institution's compliance with defined standards. If an institution fails to follow the Commission's procedures for notification and approval of substantive changes, its total accreditation may be placed in jeopardy. If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation. An applicant or candidate institution may not undergo substantive change prior to action on initial membership.</i></p>		
<p>3.12.1 The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the substantive change policy and, when required, seeks approval prior to the initiation of changes. (Substantive change)</p>	Yes	
<p><i>3.13 Responsibility for compliance with other Commission policies. The Commission's philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education on any ground other than an institution's failure to meet the requirements of the Principles of Accreditation in the professional judgment of peer reviewers, or failure to comply with the policies of the Commission.</i></p>		
<p>3.13.1 The institution complies with the policies of the Commission on Colleges. (Policy compliance)</p>	Yes	

	Authority AND Responsibility	
Principles	CEO	CAO
<p><i>3.14 Representation of status with the Commission. The institution publishes the name of its primary accreditor and its address and phone number in accordance with federal requirements. In such a publication or Web site, the institution should indicate that the Commission is to be contacted only if there is evidence that appears to support an institution's significant non-compliance with a requirement or standard. The institution is expected to be accurate in reporting to the public its status with the Commission. In order to meet these requirements, the institution lists the name, address, and telephone number in its catalog or Web site using one of the following statements: (Name of member institution) is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award (name specific degree levels, such as associate, baccalaureate, masters, doctorate). Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of (name of member institution). (Name of candidate institution) is a candidate for accreditation with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award (name specific degree levels, such as associate, baccalaureate, masters, doctorate). Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4501 for questions about the status of (name of member institution). No statement may be made about the possible future accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, nor may an institution use the logo or seal of the Southern Association in any of its publications or documents.</i></p>		
<p>3.14.1 A member or candidate institution represents its accredited status accurately and publishes the name, address, and telephone number of the Commission in accordance with Commission requirements and federal policy. (Publication of accreditation status)</p>	Yes	
<p>4.1 The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates. (Student achievement)</p>		Yes

	Authority AND Responsibility	
Principles	CEO	CAO
4.2 The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded. (Program curriculum)		Yes
4.3 The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. (Publication of policies)		Yes
4.4 Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs. (Program length)		Yes
4.5 The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (Student complaints)		Yes
4.6 Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. (Recruitment materials)		Yes
4.7 The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the <i>1998 Higher Education Amendments</i> . (In reviewing the institution's compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on documentation forwarded to it by the U.S. Department of Education.) (Title IV program responsibilities)	Yes	

^a Chief Executive Officer

^b Chief Academic Officer

VITA

Tracy Molidor, Vice President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, has been with Our Lady of the Lake College since March, 2008. She is responsible for strategic planning, institutional research and reporting, assessment, and accreditation. Ms. Molidor offers nearly 20 years professional experience in postsecondary education. She served as manager and director of university-based, governmentally-funded, statewide professional training and certification programs in Texas and Colorado. After earning a master's degree in higher education administration, Ms. Molidor was appointed Assistant Dean for the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, from 2000-2004, with primary responsibility for all aspects of finance, administration, and personnel. From 2004 to 2008, Ms. Molidor was Assistant Dean for the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, where her scope of responsibility was broadened to also include marketing, student services, enrollment management, financial aid, institutional research, and assessment. She earned a baccalaureate degree in English from the University of Texas at Arlington in 1996, a master's degree in higher education from the University of Denver in 2000, and currently is finishing her doctorate in human resource education and workforce development at Louisiana State University. Highlights of Ms. Molidor's numerous professional development experiences include participation in the Harvard Institute for Performance Assessment in Higher Education.