January 20, 2011

Greetings!

Welcome back to the Spring 2011 Semester. The new year heralds many exciting directions for us as a system, and in particular, to continue with the second Phase of the SACS Self-Study in preparation for Reaffirmation of Accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Phase II focuses on development of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

To bring you up to date, the first Phase of the Self Study involved our conducting an internal review which allowed us to gather data and look closely at every aspect of our operations over the past 10 years – since our last reaffirmation visit. Specifically, we looked at instructional programs, student learning outcomes, student support services, faculty, operations and finances, and federal requirements. The Compliance Report will be sent to SACS in March, 2011 for review by on an Off-Site Committee. That Off-Site Committee will determine how well our System has complied with the principles of accreditation, and whether we have improved on our performance since the last visit. An internal SACS Committee provided oversight for the system through the subcommittee process. The sub committees, made up of members from each college, assisted in the review of each Core Requirements or Comprehensive Standard. Many of you were directly or indirectly involved in some aspect of the Compliance Report. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your work on this project, for your commitment to quality instruction and to our students, and for moving our system this much closer to reaffirmation of accreditation. Once the Off-Site Committee completes its work, the findings will be sent back to us at LSCS for our response in a Focused Report – a time for us to address any areas that need to be strengthened.

The second phase is development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The Quality Enhancement Plan must focus on improving student learning, and strengthening organizational accountability and effectiveness. You probably remember participating in a variety of “information-gathering” sessions during the spring of 2009 and into the summer. Focus groups were held with faculty, staff and students. Kiosks were placed around campuses and in areas frequented by students so we could also get their ideas. Those sessions were designed to identify possible areas of focus for our QEP. After gathering all information, and distilling it down, it became very clear that there was overwhelming interest in a plan that would address the needs of our students in their first college experience. A topic/theme was selected: The First Year Experience, and some work has already begun.
The same process is being used to ensure participation from all colleges. The College Presidents will submit names to the QEP Committee, orientation of the new members will be held and work of the committee will begin. Expect regular updates through newsletters and on the internal SACS website (www.lonestar.edu/sacs) or www.lonestar.edu/qep. I look forward to all of us working on this great opportunity to strengthen our system and improve on the quality of instruction delivered to our students.

Richard Carpenter, Chancellor
Lone Star College System