

SACS Facts, April 2009

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) update and Models for Measuring the Process

UTC took another step in the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) on Friday, March 27 as faculty, staff and students participated in conversations about major issues identified to date. Those issues include the need to: improve the student connection between general education courses and disciplinary studies; improve critical thinking and science and reasoning skills; improve overall student engagement with the campus and the curriculum and increase connections and opportunities for service learning and international and cultural studies

Participants offered solutions related to student advisement; learning communities and freshman interest groups; student development/leadership opportunities; more cohesive, thematic general education connected to the rest of the curriculum; active learning strategies incorporated into all courses; enhanced information literacy; incorporation of service/applied learning and experiential learning opportunities and improving access to cultural studies/international experiences.

For more information about these themes and for the handouts from the QEP retreat, see <http://www.utc.edu/Administration/SACS/QEPGroup.php>

As UTC begins the early stages of preparation for its upcoming SACS reaccreditation, Dr. Andy Novobilski examines the importance of both qualitative and quantitative assessment. Development of the QEP and its evaluation must include both, said Novobilski, Head of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering and Assistant Provost for Research and Engagement. Here he talks about measuring process in his discipline:

For Computer Science and Engineering, our programs are accredited by ABET, Inc. (until 2005 known as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). Within our profession, however, is a broader measurement of the process quality employed by software engineers known as the Capability Maturity Model (CMM). Known as the Capability Maturity Model, it divides the concept of maturity into five levels:

1. Initial (chaotic, ad hoc, heroic) - the starting point for use of a new process.
2. Repeatable (project management, process discipline) - the process is used repeatedly.
3. Defined (institutionalized) - the process is defined/confirmed as a standard business process.

4. Managed (quantified) - process management and measurement takes place.
5. Optimizing (process improvement). - process management includes deliberate process optimization/improvement

To apply the principles of CMM, a producer commissions an external review which assesses the current level of the organization. From this assessment, a plan is developed to move to the next level. Once the target level is achieved, a new plan is developed to progress forward. At level five, the highest level, the organization uses both qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate process against possible improvements. The organization then updates its plan accordingly.

UTC has arrived at level five and is working to meet the challenges. Although we are not perfect at UTC, we seek to understand ourselves through self assessment in terms of quantitative numbers such as those published by the UTC Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Research. The QEP Committee hosted qualitative conversations such as the lunch meeting on March 27. Both forms of assessment are vital. They provide us the opportunity to not only prepare ourselves for the SACS visit, but to also mentor our students as they see us focused on quality measurement.