

## **SACS Facts, March 2009**

*Thanks for sharing your thoughts!*

*University faculty, staff and students participated in focus group sessions and posted comments to the online blog, assisting in the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). This critical initiative of UTC's Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaccreditation process will take the University through a process to improve learning outcomes and an improved learning environment.*

*Dean Mary Tanner of the College of Health, Education and Professional Studies believes there are great advantages ahead for the University as the campus community decides on the QEP topic, scope and assessment. In her own college, Tanner admits it was not easy to set up an assessment system and maintain a collection of data on programs from year to year, however she says the advantages are enormous. The College has access to information that helps improve programs, prepare requests for external funding, support faculty research and recruit new faculty. Another subtle advantage, according to Tanner, is that students who progress through a program of study characterized by regular and consistent assessment learn some things about work that they will encounter in their own careers.*

*The College of Health, Education and Professional Studies is proud that all fourteen programs within the college that could attain the distinction of national accreditation have done so. Dean Tanner explains:*

This is a goal we set for ourselves because we believe that students who come to UTC to study in a particular field deserve a program that has withstood the scrutiny from outside experts benchmarked against quality standards that is a nationally accredited program. This has not been an easy task but we persevered until we accomplished what we set out to do for our students.

All fourteen accreditation procedures have some common features. Whether the program prepares nurses, teachers, therapists, or social workers, by far the most common feature is the use of data. These faculties are asked to develop sophisticated assessments that collect information about student learning throughout the program of study. Most of the assessment designs collect data about their graduates even after they enter the profession. Thus, faculty must: work together to determine what students need to know and be able to do; design an educational experience that is accompanied by a system for collecting data and demonstrate how well the program is delivering. The extent to which this sort of exercise focuses the faculty on student learning is always interesting to observe. Sometimes we think we are teaching a concept only to discover that we are not because

the data shows consistent tendencies towards difficulty with a particular piece of the program.

An example of this kind of discovery occurred several years ago when the results for our students on the exit exam for teachers, the PRAXIS II indicated that UTC students were having trouble consistently with some of these content and pedagogy exams. The teacher education faculty designed a plan to review PRAXIS II scores and invited content faculty in Arts and Sciences to join them in taking the PRAXIS II exams to experience what the students encounter in this testing.

The result was that 32 faculty from across campus studied the data related to PRAXIS II performance and then took the exam themselves. The basic finding was that to some extent course requirements were not well aligned to the exam. Additionally, the faculty discovered that the type of questioning in the exam was not reflected in the way the course and course exams were designed. In the exam the students were asked to apply and expand concepts and they were not being given practice in this kind of analysis. The faculty made the changes and the scores improved.

Einstein said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." Professional people use data to make decisions.