

# Five Presidents, Two Provosts and Two Sets of Standards: Negotiating a Reaffirmation Process During a Time of Change

Keith Hollingsworth, Ph.D. Michael Hodge, Ph.D.  
Morehouse College

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# Presenters

- Keith Hollingsworth, Ph.D. – SACSCOC Coordinator
  - Professor of Business with 25 years at the College.
  - Chair of Business at the time of this process and also overseeing AACSB reaffirmation in Fall 2017.
  - Oversaw the 11 committees responsible for gathering the information, writing the report and coordinating the visit.
- Michael Hodge, Ph.D. – Provost and SACSCOC Liaison
  - Became Interim Provost in April 2017 during the time of great change.
  - Oversaw the actions of the Coordinator, provided muscle when needed and communicated with SACSCOC.



## Situation Critical!

- In January 2017, Morehouse ramped up its SACSCOC Reaffirmation effort for a March 2018 Off-Site report submittal.
- In April 2017, the President at the time was relieved of duties and an Interim President appointed. Two weeks later, the Provost was relieved and an Interim Provost (Hodge) was appointed.
- In June 2017, the Interim President died suddenly of an aneurysm. Hodge became Acting President for 21 days.
- End of June 2017, another Interim President was appointed.
- In December 2017, SACSCOC approved a new set of standards (thankfully, only added 2 standards to our load).
- January 2018, the current President assumed his role (2 months before the Off-Site report) was due.



## Situation Critical!

- So, from April 3, 2017 to January 3, 2018 (8 months), Morehouse had 5 Presidents, 2 Provosts and 2 sets of SACSCOC standards.
- Obviously, this represented a time of great upheaval and change for the College.
  - Some faculty and staff were dismayed at the loss of the original President in April and were vocal about it.
  - The first Interim President achieved great popularity within a short time frame and his sudden death rocked the community.
  - Neither of the Interim Presidents had an academic background and therefore were not as familiar with the accreditation process.
- However, quite simply, the reaffirmation process could not stop despite these upheavals. In fact, we were already running late.



## Results: Success!!

- We are pleased to report that Morehouse College turned in it's Off-Site report in March 2018.
- In May (the day before commencement) we were notified that only 7 standards were considered non-compliant and needed to be addressed.
  - Like 95% of our peers, we were non-compliant on faculty qualifications but for only 1 adjunct faculty member.
- In October/November 2018, the On-Site team visited and recommended reaffirmation with 0 recommendations.
- Morehouse's SACSCOC Accreditation was reaffirmed in July 2019.
- Yay!!! (So, what did we learn in this process.)



# Lesson 1: Accreditation is Institution-Based, Not Personnel-Based

- When we hinted to SACSCOC about a delay due to all these issues, this was the response.
- In hindsight, we completely agree. And frankly, it gives us comfort.
- In reality, you're looking at the College and its processes, over a period of years. Sudden upheavals do not change the work that you have been doing. No one person is the center of the reaffirmation process; it is too big.
- At the assembly of faculty and staff following President Taggart's sudden passing, Hollingsworth remarked to the assembly that even in the midst of all this upheaval, one thing remained constant: our mission and our focus on those students. No matter what happens in the external environment, the original focus (mission) is a constant and ultimately, reaffirmation is how well you are doing that mission.



## Lesson 2: DON'T PANIC!

*(and make sure to have your towel)*

- Stress and deadlines can improve focus, but panic can be disruptive and inefficient. Many people tried to say that we were in trouble but we kept pushing back.
- Our message was consistent: “if you believe we are doing the work we say, then it’s just a matter of telling our story”.
- We know we are not a bad college. We know our students do well. So how do show it?
- We knew documentation was more of an issue than performance. Let’s just consider how to build our case.
- (And frankly, SACSCOC is not out to “get” us or “fail” us. Try to look at them as allies, not enemies. It’s exactly how faculty expect students to view us.)



## Lesson 3: Communicate Well Upwards and Downwards

- As each President came in, he had to be educated on what this process was and how important it was. (The Board helped there.)
  - Each time, we let the President know the areas of high risk, the standards of most concern.
  - Occasionally, we needed the President to put his name behind efforts to encourage the submission of data and reports.
  - Still the message was “if we tell our story well, we’ll be fine.”
- At each monthly faculty meeting, a presentation on SACSCOC progress was made to keep sending a consistent message and to encourage participation.
  - A newsletter was attempted but not as successful. At a small school, the meetings turned out to be sufficient.



## Lesson 4: Create a Base Document/Dashboard

- The more uncertainty that surrounds the process, the more important it is to have consistent standards/messaging.



# Lesson 4: Create a Base Document/Dashboard

Faculty					
Chair: Daniel Hummer (Claude Hutto for 3.7.1)					
Status	SACSCOC Standards	Assigned To	Brief Description	Requirement Definition	Comments
1 - Low risk	2.8	Faculty - Hummer	Faculty	The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs. Upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets the comprehensive standard for faculty qualifications.	
2 - Moderate risk of noncompliance	3.4.11	Faculty - Hummer	Academic program coordination	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.	Consultant raised questions about some dept chairs. Depends if reviewers do the same.
5 - Severe risk of noncompliance	3.5.4	Faculty - Hummer	Terminal degrees of faculty	At least 25 percent of the course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding an appropriate terminal degree, usually the earned doctorate, or the equivalent of the terminal degree.	Kinesiology fails this standard. We are admitting partial compliance.
5 - Severe risk of noncompliance	3.7.1	Hutto	Faculty competence	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. (See Commission guidelines "Faculty Credentials.")	The odds that the reviewers will find at least one faculty member with insufficient documentation is high. Long term risk is very low.
3 - Elevated risk of noncompliance	3.7.2	Faculty - Hummer	Faculty evaluation	The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.	Missing memo of part-time faculty evaluation.
1 - Low risk	3.7.3	Faculty - Hummer	Faculty development	The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.	
3 - Elevated risk of noncompliance	3.7.4	Faculty - Hummer	Academic freedom	The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom.	We explicitly protect academic freedom in P&T process. No procedure/policy outside of that and no time to create one. May or may not get flagged.
1 - Low risk	3.7.5	Faculty - Hummer	Faculty role in governance	The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters.	



## Lesson 5: Use an External Consultant/Reviewer

- We found that extra set of eyes to be invaluable.
- Our consultant helped to find our weak points, items that seemed perfectly obvious to us but, in hindsight, needed further clarification.
- We believe our consultant moved us from a “C” paper to an “A”.
- We would recommend it to anyone but particularly when the College is already overwhelmed with change. It’s too easy for things to slide through the cracks.



## Lesson 6: Get a Champion on your Board

- Morehouse was fortunate to have a former College President (Dr. Dorothy Yancy) on our Board and she provided a constant support among all the changes.
- Dr. Yancy informed each President about the urgency of the Reaffirmation work and what he was required to do.
- She also schooled the Board on their responsibility and ensured they understood the urgency.
- Probably more significant at a smaller college but the constancy at the Board level helped mitigate the inconstancy at the College level.



# Summary – Navigating Reaffirmation in the Midst of Great Change

- Lesson 1 – Accreditation is institution-based, not personnel.
- Lesson 2 – Be calm. SACSCOC Coordinator/Liaison has to project constancy and consistency.
- Lesson 3 – Consistent communication upwards and downwards.
- Lesson 4 – Create a base document/dashboard to monitor progress.
- Lesson 5 – Use an external reviewer.
- Lesson 6 – Have a Board champion.



Questions?



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