

Preparing for the On-Site Visit of the
**SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND
SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES**

Clayton State University | April 1–4, 2024

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**Clayton State
University**


SACSCOC Reaffirmation Overview

Accreditation is the way the federal government ensures compliance with federal laws and mandates for higher education. Additionally, accreditation determines the institution’s eligibility to receive federal and state funds, and our ability to transfer credits with other schools. Accreditation is also important to our reputation by ensuring students and taxpayers of our accountability. CSU was first accredited in 1971, and our last reaffirmation was 2014. We are a Level III (master’s degree-granting) institution. Accreditation is an ongoing process with formal reviews and reporting every five and ten years. This is our decennial review for reaffirmation.

Our SACSCOC representative is Dr. Kelli Randall, Vice President, SACSCOC.



See <https://www.clayton.edu/sacscoc/reaffirmations> for additional information.

Reaffirmation Timeline Class of 2024							
Compliance Certification Preparation	Prepared 2022 and 2023	Submitted Sept. 8, 2023	Off-Site Peer reviewers read and offered feedback on our narrative.	Received Feedback Nov. 2023	Focused Report submitted Feb. 19, 2024		
QEP Preparation	Planned and formed team 2022	Identified topic	Developed the QEP 2022-2023	Solicited Feedback; Refined and edited Fall 2023	QEP submitted Feb. 19, 2024		
On-Site Visit Preparation			Establish On-Site Planning Committee 2023	Establish teams, budget, make reservations	Community preparation	Host On-Site Committee April 1-4, 2024	Announcement at SACSCOC Meeting Dec. 5-8, 2024

The On-Site Visit

On April 1–4, 2024, Clayton State will host the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. This committee is comprised of peer reviewers who undergo training and volunteer to be peer reviewers. They are not compensated for this work, and the reviewers are all from colleges and universities in the SACSCOC region, but not Georgia. This On-Site Reaffirmation Committee has three goals for the on-site visit:

1. resolve any Compliance Certification issues that were not explained thoroughly in the Focused Report,
2. review the QEP, and
3. review standards that they are required to verify by the United States Department of Education.

The team is here to review the institution, so they will work privately together as a whole and in smaller groups with various people from Clayton State. While we will provide transportation to restaurants each evening, we do not join them for evening meals. Dr. Lamb will work with the chair of the committee (Dr. Luke) and our SACS VP (Dr. Randall) to create a schedule of their visit in advance based on their requests. They may request to meet with individuals or groups of people (students, faculty, or staff) to understand specific issues related to compliance issues and aspects of the QEP. While we will finalize the schedule as much as possible, there may be interviews scheduled at the last minute based on their review of our materials. Expect most meetings to occur on Tuesday, April 2, and Wednesday, April 3.

General Schedule

Monday, April 1

On-Site Reaffirmation Committee members begin to arrive in Morrow, Georgia at various times during the day; we will meet them at the airport and transport them to the hotel. We will show them the hotel workroom, ensure their technology needs, and drive them to a restaurant for supper that night.

Tuesday, April 2 – Wednesday, April 3

On-Site Reaffirmation Committee conducts review work; QEP presentation, meetings, interviews, and campus tours.

Thursday, April 4

The Exit Conference is usually held at the hotel so the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee can leave immediately for the airport.

The Exit Conference

At the Exit Conference, The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will present its findings to institutional representatives. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee shares orally an overview of their draft report of findings: no written documents are shared. These findings

will include any recommendations related to standards for which the institution has not yet demonstrated compliance; the chair reads the recommendations, and there is no discussion.

On-Site Reaffirmation Committees often provide consultative advice about the QEP, and discussion of these suggestions for modifications or enhancements is encouraged during the Exit Conference, since communication or consultation (paid or unpaid) with committee members, including the QEP Lead Evaluator, after the visit concludes is not allowed until after the SACSCOC Board of Trustees takes action on the institution's reaffirmation.

What Happens Next?

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will present its findings to institutional representatives during the exit conference. These findings will include any recommendations related to standards for which the institution has not yet demonstrated compliance.

Within three to four weeks following the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee's visit, the chair will send our institution a draft of the committee report to review for factual errors. The final report, titled *Report of the Reaffirmation Committee*, is received about one month after the visit, and will include any recommendations (a formal statement written by an evaluation committee indicating the institution's lack of compliance with a standard). At this time, the institution is required to respond to all recommendations cited by the committee. The institution's response (Response to Visiting Committee Report) and copies of its Quality Enhancement Plan are usually due five months after the committee's visit is concluded.

A Committee on Compliance and Reports (C&R), one of the standing committees of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, will receive and review the *Report of the Reaffirmation Committee* and the response of the institution to the committee's report. The Executive Council and the full SACSCOC Board of Trustees will receive the C&R Committee report and will make a decision regarding the institution's accreditation and any follow-up activities that it requires of the institution.

Possible Outcomes

- We are found in full compliance.
- We are asked to submit monitoring reports every 6 to 12 months for up to two years. Monitoring reports provide additional documentation of compliance for those standards identified by the Committee on Compliance and Reports following review of a committee's findings as issues for which full compliance has not yet been documented.
- At any time during the 2-year monitoring period or after, we may receive a sanction (either warning or probation) if we are not making sufficient progress toward compliance.

What to Expect During the Visit

U.S. Department of Education Requirements

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) requirements for recognition of an accrediting agency include the on-site review of several criteria, which are embedded in specific SACSCOC standards. For these specific standards, even if the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee determined Compliance, these standards must also be reviewed by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

Core Requirements (CR) are basic, broad-based, foundational requirements and are required of all institutions seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation.

They will also try to resolve compliance issues that they have yet to resolve through the Compliance Certification, the Focused Report, and subsequent exchanges of information.

Standard	Descriptor	On-Site	CR	Off-Site Found Compliance?
1. The Principle of Integrity				
1.1	Integrity	On-site	CR	✓
2. Mission				
2.1	Institutional Mission		CR	✓
3. Basic Eligibility Standard				
3.1.a, b, and c	Degree-granting authority, coursework for degrees, continuous operation		CR	✓
4. Governing Board				
4.1	Governing Board Characteristics		CR	✓
4.2.a, b, c, d, e, f, g	Mission, governance, CEO eval., conflict of interest, board dismissal, ext. influence			✓
5. Administration and Organization				
5.1	Chief Executive Officer		CR	✓
5.2.a, b, c	CEO, athletics, fundraising			✓
5.3	Instit.-Related Entities			✓
5.4	Qualified administrative/academic officers	On-site		
5.5	Personnel Appt. and Evaluation			✓
6. Faculty				
6.1	Full-time faculty	On-site	CR	✓

6.2.a	Faculty Qualifications			
6.2.b	Program faculty	On-site		
6.2.c	Program coordination	On-site		✓
6.3	Faculty Employment and Eval.			
6.4	Academic Freedom			
6.5	Faculty Development			
7. Institutional Planning and Effectiveness				
7.1	Institutional Planning		CR	
7.2	QEP			
7.3	Administrative Effectiveness			
8. Student Achievement				
8.1	Student achievement	On-site	CR	
8.2.a	Student outcomes: educational programs	On-site		
8.2.b	Student outcomes: general education			
8.2.c	Student outcomes: academic and student services			
9. Educational Program Structure and Content				
9.1	Program content	On-site	CR	✓
9.2	Program length	On-site	CR	✓
9.3	General education requirements	On-site	CR	✓
9.4	Instit. Credits for an undergrad. degree			
9.5	Instit. Credits for a graduate. degree			
9.6	Post-baccalaureate rigor and curriculum			✓
9.7	Program Requirements			✓
10. Educational Policies, Procedures, and Practices				
10.1	Academic Policies			
10.2	Public information	On-site		✓
10.3	Archived Information			✓
10.4	Academic governance			✓
10.5	Admissions policies and practices	On-site		
10.6	Distance and correspondence education	On-site		✓
10.7	Policies for awarding credit	On-site		✓
10.8	Evaluating and awarding ext. acad. credit			✓

10.9	Cooperative academic arrangements			
11. Library and Learning/Information Resources				
11.1	Library and learning/information resources		CR	
11.2	Library and learning/information staff			
11.3	Library and learning/information access			
12. Academic and Student Support Services				
12.1	Student support services	On-site	CR	
12.2	Student support services: staff			
12.3	Student rights			✓
12.4	Student complaints	On-site		✓
12.5	Student records			
12.6	Student debt and financial literacy			✓
13. Financial and Physical Resources				
13.1	Financial Resources		CR	
13.2	Financial Documents		CR	
13.3	Financial responsibility			✓
13.4	Control of Finances			
13.5	Control of research/sponsored funds			
13.6	Federal and state responsibilities	On-site		✓
13.7	Physical resources	On-site		✓
13.8	Healthy safe environment			✓
14. Transparency and Institutional Representation				
14.1	Publication of accreditation status	On-site		✓
14.2	Substantive Change			✓
14.3	Comprehensive institutional reviews	On-site		✓
14.4	Representation to other agencies	On-site		✓
14.5	Policy Compliance			✓

Quality Enhancement Plan

Clayton State is known for its personalized attention, small class sizes, affordable career opportunities, and real-life experiences that provide our Lakers a competitive *edge* upon graduation. Like many other campuses, CSU has experienced several transitions over the past few years, coupled with the aftermath of the COVID pandemic; student completion rates and student engagement have decreased. As a result, the institution has experienced a decline in retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a requirement designated by the institution’s accrediting agency: SACSCOC. Each institution is required to submit a QEP, which is a 5-year plan based on student success plans. CSU’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focuses on developing a comprehensive first-year experience program that will encompass the following: extended orientation, first-year seminar, learning communities and career competencies. This plan aligns with the institutional mission of cultivating an “environment of engaged, experienced-based learning, enriched by active community service, that prepares students of diverse ages and backgrounds to succeed in their lives and careers.”



This new initiative is called, **Laker’s E.D.G.E.** (Education, Development, Goals, and Employment). Students who participate in the program will focus on career exploration and student engagement by providing holistic learning experiences through the establishment of intentional career paths and initiatives that enhance learning. Laker’s E.D.G.E. has been developed to make a positive impact on the student learning environment and ultimately increase retention, progression, and graduation rates at Clayton State University. Laker’s E.D.G.E. combines the traditional orientation and academic success seminar (extended orientation to campus resources and instruction in basic study skills) with NACE’s Career Readiness framework, which addresses career-related goals and outcomes of curricular and extracurricular activities. The chart below provides a breakdown of the program structure.

1 st Semester	2 nd Semester
First-Year Seminar – CSU 1000 Academic Coach (Living) Learning Community Engagement Activities and Goals – Teamwork	Career Bootcamp (D2L) Academic Coach (Living) Learning Community Engagement Activities and Goals – Career & Self-Development

Employers have often stated that career readiness plays an important role in identifying key skills across all job functions. By providing these types of experiences to Clayton State’s students, the University is preparing students for career paths of today and industries of tomorrow. Nonetheless, implementing these efforts prior to the start of class (orientation) and throughout the first year lays the foundation of the holistic approach to student success.

Our On-Site Reaffirmation Committee



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Dr. Pamela Thompson
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Assistant Dean, Academic
Success and Advising
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Tips for the On-Site Visit: Before and During

Do

- ✓ Prepare in advance by reviewing materials and documentation
- ✓ Let the SACSCOC team set the pace of the interview
- ✓ Listen carefully to the question being asked and tailor your answer
- ✓ Be thorough but concise in your response
- ✓ Answer all questions honestly and to the best of your ability
- ✓ Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question
- ✓ Inform Dr. Lamb if you can't answer a question or if they ask for specific documentation you didn't bring
- ✓ Notify Dr. Lamb if you will be late or cannot attend a scheduled meeting.
- ✓ Be honest and be yourself
- ✓ Remain professional, cordial, and respectful
- ✓ Arrive early to meetings, enter quietly

Don't

- × Contact the committee members ahead of time
- × Provide information not specifically requested by members of the Committee
- × Volunteer information on matters about which you may not be entirely informed
- × Chat or make small talk with the reviewers (unless they initiate)
- × Interrupt or attempt to get insight into their judgement of our compliance
- × Talk, laugh, and whisper with colleagues before the meetings; greetings are ok, but don't use the time to catch up or address other work issues with colleagues
- × Gossip, criticize, or blame others
- × Make excuses or negative comments
- × Lie or misrepresent anything
- × Treat the interview casually
- × Be late or unprepared
- × Talk or text on your phone during meetings
- × Answer emails during meetings
- × Use a lot of acronyms without context
- × Give one- or two-word answers
- × Quiz reviewers about their institution's processes

General Tips

- Operate with integrity in all matters related to SACSCOC. This is in the Principles of Accreditation, Section 1 and something on which we are assessed.
- If you are asked for an interview about a standard that falls within your area, please bring copies of whatever documents are requested and be prepared to answer questions about the history of your area, processes, the data, or additional questions.
- Wear your Clayton State nametag April 2-4.
- Answer honestly. If you do not know the answer, say so and ask for time to find out. Contact Dr. Lamb or other member of the leadership team.
- Focus on the positive attributes of the university and the strategies that are in place for areas needing improvement without boasting or exaggerating (see 1.1 Integrity).
- Treat our review committee as colleagues. The members of the committee are provosts, deans, presidents, and vice presidents. They understand the complexity of the SACSCOC standards and the landscape of higher education.
- Ensure that all Clayton State webpages have current information. The reviewers are volunteers who will have prepared thoroughly for their visit. In addition to reading our Compliance Certification,

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and the Focused Report, they will read our *Faculty Handbook*, *Policy Manuals*, catalog, and the university website.

- Develop an understanding of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).
- Know the basic concepts in our Mission statement:
Clayton State University cultivates an environment of engaged, experienced-based learning, enriched by active community service, that prepares students of diverse ages and backgrounds to succeed in their lives and careers.
- The areas the On-Site Committee members are most likely to investigate:
 - QEP, including meeting with various constituents to learn how the plan was developed, how it's going, plans for implementation and assessment
 - Assessment, including possible meetings with program coordinators and those charged with assessment on campus
 - Students, including those who work with student complaints, distance learning for students
 - Faculty, including those who verify faculty credentials, hiring and evaluation of faculty, academic regulations, and collaborative agreements
 - Mission and Strategic Plan, including how those relate to teaching, learning, and curriculum, the budget, and planning and assessment
 - Any lingering compliance issues
 - While we cannot know the questions ahead of time, you can prepare by studying the materials we submitted, reviewing the history of your area, and current plans.
 - Meetings will be started by a member of the Reaffirmation Leadership Team, who will make introductions and ensure technology is working correctly. The remainder of the meeting will be a conversation between the review committee and CSU representatives.

Tips for Students

Students should expect questions related to the student experience, including the QEP. Be prepared to describe student life at the university, including but not limited to advising, campus facilities (classrooms, labs, libraries, athletics), campus dining, student life, health and wellness services, career services, and student organizations. You may also be asked about your major, why you chose your major, and challenges you've faced as a Clayton State student.

Tips for Board Members and Cabinet

Leadership should expect broad questions about the following: 1) ways in which the university fulfills its mission, 2) how governing structure and lines of responsibility are followed, and 3) the QEP.

Tips for Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Participants in the sessions for the Department of Education standards should expect very specific questions related to the topic at hand. Prepare by reviewing the narrative and all supporting documentation submitted during the Compliance Certification and the Focused Report. Be sure to read and understand the guidelines published in the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* for your area. Feel free to have documentation and notes on hand during the meeting, but do not try to predict questions or draft answers ahead of time. You may be asked to provide additional documentation after the meeting; if this happens, let a member of the leadership team know what has been requested so they can facilitate providing that information.

Contact Information

Reaffirmation Leadership Team

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Thank you! Clayton State's reaccreditation is due to your efforts every day.