



# VSU Connection

For the Faculty, Staff and Members of the Valdosta State University Community

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## Reaffirmation Process Calls for Campus Involvement

Just as people must critically examine themselves to progress, universities must evaluate their offerings and practices to maintain standards of quality education.

Valdosta State University is undergoing assessment to ensure the university continues to provide innovative learning approaches and advance institutional improvements. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) — the regional accrediting body for institutions of higher education in 11 Southeastern states — requires universities to undergo reaffirmation of accreditation every 10 years to assure the public of the institution's integrity.

Since VSU completed the rigorous review process in 2000, the SACS Commission on Colleges has reorganized its compliance requirements. In 2002, the organization traded mandatory "must" and "should" statements for 83 requirements and standards tied to the university's mission, educational objectives and learning outcomes. VSU must supply supporting documentation for each requirement to prove compliance. An off-site committee reviews the institution's compliance report prior to an on-campus visit by a separate committee of professional peers.

"What I find exciting about the new SACS process is the fact that it allows faculty, staff and students to show what a progressive, dynamic place VSU is, academically and administratively," said Dr. Jane Kinney, director of Accreditation Compliance. "What we do, we do extremely well, and SACS helps us showcase that."

### Campus Involvement

The SACS Commission on Colleges requires each department and office to demonstrate its effectiveness at achieving and measuring its success, whether its goal is superior customer service at the dining hall or thought-provoking discussion in English class. Dr. Kristina Cragg, assistant to the president for Strategic Research and Analysis, joins Kinney in coordinating VSU's compliance process.

"It is important that VSU provide justification and documentation for each core requirement, comprehensive standard and federal requirement as this is the means through which SACS evaluates VSU for reaffirmation of accreditation," said Cragg, who serves as the SACS Liaison. "Accreditation from SACS enables VSU to be eligible for Title IV funds (student financial aid)

as well as provides VSU with the authority to grant degrees."

To encourage an atmosphere of continuous improvement, academic departments must have clearly stated goals to improve student learning, and administrative units need to demonstrate their commitment to service and support to the university community. All areas must design effective assessment programs to measure success in achieving those goals.

VSU is establishing a University Assessment Committee to regularly review and evaluate assessment plans and activities to ensure departments and offices are achieving initiatives. Dr. Julie Lee, Associate Dean of the Dewar College of Education, will chair the committee.

"VSU has formed the foundation for a culture of continuous assessment and improvement through campus efforts such as the academic program review process and the strategic planning database," President Ronald M. Zaccari said. "It is critical that faculty, staff, and students build on this foundation, placing heightened emphasis on institutional goals while simultaneously preparing for SACS reaffirmation."

### Quality Enhancement Plan

The SACS reorganization also introduced the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which mandates VSU develop a multi-year project that enhances student learning and is linked to the mission of the university. Because SACS believes in engaging the broader academic community, VSU's QEP Task Force invites faculty, staff and students to submit enhancement plan ideas. VSU's SACS Leadership Team, headed by President Zaccari, will choose the final QEP prospectus, which the university will then submit in 2009 to a SACS-selected committee prior to the group's visit to campus for review in the spring of 2010. VSU will then initiate the QEP in summer of 2010.

VSU will receive notice of the university's accreditation status in December 2010.

For more information about SACS, call Kinney at (229) 249-2609 or e-mail her at [jkinney@valdosta.edu](mailto:jkinney@valdosta.edu). For an overview of reaffirmation process, go to the university's SACS Web site at [www.valdosta.edu/sacs/](http://www.valdosta.edu/sacs/). ■

ROBERT LACEY

# University Invites Employee Ideas to Improve Student Learning

Valdosta State University is calling for the views and suggestions of faculty, staff and students to develop a multi-year project designed to enhance student learning at VSU.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a main component of the university's reaffirmation of accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which endorses institutions of higher education in 11 Southeastern states. SACS introduced the QEP requirement in 2002 to encourage universities to involve the wider university community in providing optimum learning opportunities and environments to students.

"Faculty and staff can contribute to our success with the reaffirmation in direct and meaningful ways, especially by contributing ideas for enhancing student learning to the QEP task force," said Dr. Jane Kinney, director of Accreditation Compliance.

In late November 2007, the university established a QEP Phase 1 Task Force to publicize the enhancement plan concept and to solicit proposals from VSU constituents. The task force of 17 VSU faculty, staff and students — representing a cross section of the VSU community — will set timelines for the collection of QEP ideas and gather data about each idea's feasibility. Under the leadership of Michael Savoie, associate professor of Communication Arts, the task force will select the three best potential QEP proposals to present to VSU's SACS Leadership Team, headed by President Ronald M. Zaccari. In December 2009, the campus must submit a fully researched prospectus, which an on-site SACS committee of professional peers will review in the spring of 2010.

"The plan must be a unique and specific campus-wide initiative to improve student learning," Savoie said. "It is essential that we solicit input from faculty, staff and, most importantly, students."

The task force has established a QEP Web site at [www.valdosta.edu/qep](http://www.valdosta.edu/qep) to inform VSU about the project and to provide the university community with a forum to convey their suggestions. The

Web site features general information, task force dates and membership lists, links to VSU's strategic plan, the proposal form and deadlines. VSU faculty, staff and students are encouraged to suggest project ideas on the e-proposal form; hard copies of the proposal form will be distributed throughout campus and may be returned to the Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 1124 Nevins Hall.

The QEP proposal guidelines are broad so as to encourage creative, original ideas to enhance institutional quality and effectiveness. Once VSU initiates the chosen QEP in the summer of 2010,

the university will have five years to show the project has contributed to institutional improvements. SACS will visit the campus in 2015 to review progress of the QEP.

"The QEP compels an institution to address a specific need and offers a broad-based approach to enhancing

student learning and assessment," Savoie said. "It is rare to have so many constituencies contributing to the outcome of such an important and critical initiative for VSU."

For more information about the QEP or the task force, call Savoie at (229) 333-7399 or e-mail him at [mpsavoie@valdosta.edu](mailto:mpsavoie@valdosta.edu). General questions about the enhancement plan may be sent to [qep@valdosta.edu](mailto:qep@valdosta.edu). ■

**The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Task Force will host a public forum Wednesday, Feb. 6 from 3-4 p.m. in the Library Auditorium – room 1160.**

## QEP IDEAS MUST...

- **Be a focused topic directly related to student learning and linked to VSU's mission.**
- **State clear goals.**
- **Be plausible with the university's existing resources.**
- **Contain evaluation strategies for determining the achievement of its goal(s).**
- **Show evidence of community development and support of the plan.**

— From the SACS Web site

## Renowned Explorer to Visit Campus

National Geographic Explorer-In-Residence, Wade Davis, will visit campus Feb. 13 to share universal truths he has gleaned from 25 years of world travels to remote and often forgotten societies. The Presidential Lecture Series presentation, sure to be accompanied by exquisite photographs and equally colorful tales, will be held at 7 p.m. at Whitehead Auditorium in the Fine Arts Building.

The writer, photographer, filmmaker and author of 11 books will speak specifically about his latest book, "Light at the Edge of the World: A Journey through the Realm of Vanishing Cultures." The book, which was published in 2002, explores the practices and beliefs of indigenous cultures that have survived off the Earth and remained largely untouched by the forces of modernization. The passionate anthropologist insists that the knowledge and outlook of such cultures can benefit the world, and that the demise of indigenous peoples will diminish all cultures.

"It is my hope that these photographs and stories will provide a moving and visceral sense of the wondrous diversity

and character of ... the sum of all thoughts, beliefs, myths, and intuitions made manifest today by the myriad cultures of the world," said Davis, who received the \$125,000 Lannan Foundation Literary Award for Nonfiction in 2002.

Described by ABC's "20/20" as a real life Indiana Jones, Davis's expeditions have been the subject of about 600 media reports and accounts, including three episodes of the "X-files" television series.

Davis, who received a PhD in Ethnobotany from Harvard University, has spoken to more than 120 universities about his passion to celebrate the wonder and diversity of humanity. ■



## VSUConnection

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The VSU Connection is a semimonthly newsletter designed to inform VSU personnel and students about the latest campus-wide news. Check out the Connection online at [www.valdosta.edu/news/](http://www.valdosta.edu/news/).

For more information about the Connection or to submit a story idea, email Kate Heine, Communication Specialist for the Office of the President, Communication Unit, at [kaheine@valdosta.edu](mailto:kaheine@valdosta.edu).