

THE MOST COMMON DEFICIENCIES OF  
GEORGIA'S PUBLIC TECHNICAL COLLEGES  
AND SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS  
LEVEL I INSTITUTIONS SEEKING REGIONAL ACCREDITATION

by

BARRY DOTSON

(Under the Direction of Helen C. Hall)

ABSTRACT

Achieving regional accreditation status represents a major investment of time, effort, and resources. This process can be difficult for community and technical colleges due to lack of resources and staff. In an attempt to provide guidance for colleges entering the initial or reaffirmation of accreditation review process, a study was undertaken to examine accreditation documents to see if any common deficiencies existed. The most common findings of deficiencies from Georgia's public technical colleges and other community and/or technical colleges seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation during the years of 2003, 2004, and 2005 were reviewed. The study focused on Level I colleges in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges that met the stated criteria. Data from each college were analyzed individually, and then compared to other colleges in the state and other colleges by size. Findings of this study had implications for administrators of technical colleges in Georgia. The data suggested that proper academic credentials of faculty members was among the most common deficiencies cited for Georgia's technical colleges and other Level I

colleges in the South. Other areas of concern included institutional effectiveness of educational programs, financial resources, and the Quality Enhancement Plan.

**INDEX WORDS:** accreditation, regional accrediting agencies, technical education, community colleges, community and technical colleges.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, both of whom have been watching out for me from Heaven for quite some time. I never completely expressed my appreciation for all the sacrifices that you made that enabled me to go to college to achieve my first degree. Thank you for everything that you provided that enabled me to reach this point in my life. I also would like to dedicate this work to my son, Allen, his wife Jamie, and their three wonderful children, Clay, Carlie, and Chasie. Thank you for putting up with the endless responses from me that I was too busy to do anything because I had homework or I needed to work on my dissertation. I appreciate your patience, endurance, and never complaining about me having to do “homework”.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Two-year colleges in the United States have a long history of providing educational opportunities to those who might not otherwise be able to participate in postsecondary education (Bragg & Hamm, 1999). These institutions possess many features that make them desirable to a diverse population of students including affordability, accessibility/location, and program offerings (Zeiss, 1986). Adams (2005) stated that regardless of whether they are called technical or community colleges, two-year colleges all have the same basic mission, to serve the educational and training needs of all citizens of this country, regardless of educational background.

The United States Department of Labor (2005) publishes statistics on a continual basis reaffirming the importance of technical education in this country. A majority of the jobs in this country require some additional training beyond high school, but not a four year baccalaureate degree (United States Department of Labor, 2005). The Department further predicted that most jobs created in this country over the next 20 years will continue the same pattern (United States Department of Labor, 2005). Additionally, the United States Department of Education (2005) stated that the percentage of jobs in this country that required a four year baccalaureate degree has remained constant since 1950. Adams (2005) stated that these statistics highlight the importance of technical education to this country:

We are the vanguard for universal postsecondary education and training for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are, and will continue to be, the institution that provides the technicians, the skilled workers, the front line health care personnel, and the many other semi-

professional and professional workers who keep the gears of this nation greased and functional. We are institutions that can be proud of our mission to train the workforce, to provide an institution with an open door, to make major contributions to the cultural and economic development in the communities where we are located. (p. 34)

Despite the importance of technical education to our nation's economy, many worry that technical education may be straying from its roots (Adams, 2005; Levin 2000). According to Adams (2005), transferability of credit has always been part of the core mission of community colleges, but that has not always been true of technical colleges. However, as technical education has grown tremendously over the past 20 years, it has attempted to stay responsive not only to the training needs of business and industry, but also to the desire of students for transferability of academic credit (Levin, 1999). Cohen & Brawer (1996) and Levin (2000) stated that while technical colleges should not lose sight of their primary job of workforce development, the technical college of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must function from a model that provides more student-oriented services such as greater transferability of credit.

Public technical institutes in the state of Georgia became two year technical colleges offering associate degrees in the year 2000 (Breedon, 2000). The Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) is the state organization that manages the operations of the state's 34 public technical colleges as well as adult literacy programs and the Quick Start economic development program (Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, 2003). Prior to 2000, technical institutes offered diploma programs and short-term certificate training, with little to no transfer credit to a University System of Georgia college available to DTAE technical college students. This was a point of frustration for many students in Georgia's technical college system (Few, 2000). As the technical colleges began offering associate degree

programs, the Commissioner of the Department acknowledged the need for greater transferability of credit for Georgia's technical college students (Breedon, 2000):

Our technical education system has always been focused exclusively on the preparation of people for work and careers. This mission has not and will not change. We have always insisted that all of our programs be primarily designed to prepare people for the workforce. We have also always placed significant emphasis on creating lifelong opportunities for the upward mobility and flexibility of our citizens, students, and graduates. Thus, we have always encouraged transferability of courses and programs offered by Georgia's technical education institutions to colleges and universities. We will continue to maintain our focus on preparation of our students for work and careers, and we will . . . work toward the creation of seamless programs that promote and provide for the upward mobility and flexibility of Georgia's postsecondary technical students. (p. 24)

During the years between 2000 and 2002, a strategic plan was developed for the agency that included a goal that all technical colleges would obtain Commission on Colleges accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (DTAE, 2002). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is one of six recognized regional accrediting bodies in the United States (Miller, 1998). The Southern Association, often referred to as SACS, includes institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees in the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

The Commission on Colleges (COC) is one of three commissions under the umbrella of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Miller, 1998). The Commission on Colleges is responsible for developing standards for and the accreditation of postsecondary degree-

granting institutions in eleven southern states. The other commissions within SACS are the Commission on Elementary and Middle schools and the Commission on Secondary and Middle Schools. This accreditation goal by DTAE coincided with the election of a new governor in Georgia who created several new task forces, including one that recommended greater transferability of credit for all of Georgia's students (Commission for a New Georgia, 2003).

However, greater transferability of credit is not necessarily something that can be achieved quickly because University System of Georgia colleges and universities and DTAE technical colleges are accredited through different accrediting agencies. The 34 colleges and universities of the University System of Georgia are accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Most DTAE technical colleges are accredited by the Council on Occupational Education, a national accrediting agency (University System of Georgia, 2005; Department of Technical and Adult Education, 2004). Regional accrediting agencies tend not to accept credit easily from institutes accredited by national accrediting agencies.

Differences in accreditation highlight the distinction between region and national accreditation. Regional accreditation can be traced back to the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCACSS), (Geiger, 1970). In 1913, NCACSS released a list of accredited colleges and universities (Selden & Porter, 1977). The need for accreditation came about because no clear consensus existed on what constituted a college or university (Pfinster, 1983). Accrediting bodies were formed in all regions of the country and similar lists were developed. As the regional accrediting bodies were growing and evolving, it was decided that a need existed to distinguish member institutions from institutions that were inadequate or deficient (Selden & Porter, 1977). The NCACSS developed a requirement that member

institutions would be evaluated by certain standards and inspected to ensure that they met those standards. By the early 1950s, all regional accrediting agencies required as a condition of membership that institutions meet certain established accreditation requirements (Selden, 1960).

A result of all of these actions was that regional accreditation came to be known as a means of identifying “better” schools (Palinchak, 1993). Schools that adhered to certain standards were deemed reputable because they met certain standards. Because accreditation guaranteed adherence to established criteria, students could transfer to other regional colleges (Palinchak, 1993). By the early 1950s, a firm system of six postsecondary regional accrediting agencies that encompassed the United States came to be in place accrediting colleges and universities, with the developing national accreditation agencies accrediting other types of postsecondary education (Palinchak, 1993).

As recently as twenty five years ago, the six regional accrediting bodies were the only agencies that accredited degree granting institutions (Bloland, 1999). Since that time, recognized accrediting agencies have been approved by the Department of Education to approve specific types of education institutions (United States Department of Education, n.d.). These are called “national” accrediting agencies.

A confusing aspect of accreditation definitions is that “national” accrediting agencies are considered a level below “regional” accreditation (Adams, 2005). To further confuse the accreditation landscape, some two-year colleges are accredited by national accrediting bodies and some by a regional accrediting agency. This is because in some states, universities dominate the delivery of the two-year degree by offering more programs and services than two year colleges, while in other states, technical and community colleges dominate the two year landscape (Bloland, 1999). So, a national mixture has developed including some four year

colleges offering two year degrees and holding regional accreditation and two year colleges offering degrees holding either regional or national accreditation. For example, in South Carolina, all two year technical colleges are accredited by the regional Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges while in neighboring Georgia, the technical colleges were accredited by a national accrediting agency, the Council on Occupational Education, until several years ago (CHEA, 2005).

The six regional accrediting agencies are autonomous, separate commissions with their own standards and rules of operation (Bloland, 1999). The six regional accrediting agencies have had an enormous influence on higher education in this country, as the majority of degree granting institutions are accredited by one of the six regional accreditation agencies (Selden & Porter, 1977). As a result, they have required that a college be an accredited member for credit to transfer between colleges and have denied transfer credit to non-members (Pfinster, 1983). Therefore, students taking classes at Georgia's technical college system have long been denied transfer credit access to University System of Georgia colleges.

All technical colleges in Georgia are now proceeding to add Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (COC) accreditation (Department of Technical and Adult Education, 2002). Because of the number of technical colleges not accredited by COC, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) has developed a system of processing no more than four technical colleges per fiscal year through the COC initial application process. This is due to the complexity of the process and the massive amount of agency resources required during the process. A complete financial audit (sometimes lasting three months) for three consecutive years is required as well as data, plans, and reports.

Within regional accrediting agencies, colleges are classified according to the highest level of degree offered (Commission on Colleges, 2001). Level I institutions offer two-year associate degrees as the highest level of degree offered. As a result, Level I institutions include institutions typically referred to as technical or vocational colleges, junior colleges, and community colleges. Other levels include:

Level II – institutions offering Baccalaureate degrees;

Level III – institutions offering Master's degrees;

Level IV – institutions offering Master's and Specialist degrees

Level V – institutions offering Doctoral degrees in three or fewer major academic or professional disciplines;

Level VI – institutions offering Doctoral degrees in four or more major academic or professional disciplines.

As of December 2004, there were more Level I institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools than any other type. Forty percent of the member institutions in COC were considered to be Level I colleges (COC, 2004). All Georgia DTAE institutions fall within the Level I college category.

#### Statement of the Problem

Accreditation by the COC represents a significant investment in terms of funds expended and in faculty and staff hours devoted to the development and production of the self-study, now called the compliance certification document. The time frame from formation of an institutional self-study committee to the final follow-up report often exceeds four years. This self-study task is made more difficult because despite the additional work required for the self-study process, additional staff is usually not hired due to budget constraints.

Due to the lack of additional staff, and the massive amount of required work for the self-study, all technical colleges in Georgia face a tremendous challenge to prepare for Commission on Colleges accreditation. Between 2002 and 2005, two colleges had been granted initial accreditation status, while two withdrew their application (SACS/COC, 2006). One application was withdrawn after the self-study process was complete and a visit by a COC site team. As of January 2006, four colleges were in the “candidate” status and six colleges were in the “applicant” status attempting to move to the “candidate” status (SACS/COC, 2006).

Institutions suffer as little data exists to document specific criteria that received recommendations for improvement or were found as inadequate. All colleges, whether seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation, are judged in part on the twelve Core Requirements that COC considers essential to accreditation. These Core Requirements are part of the “new” Principles of Accreditation as well as the previous Criteria for Accreditation. The Principles of Accreditation is a publication of SACS containing the information needed to gain accreditation. To gain or maintain accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must comply with the standards contained in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement and with the policies and procedures of the Commission on Colleges. The Commission on Colleges applies the requirements of its Principles to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions, regardless of type of institution. Institutions must satisfactorily respond to each recommendation before accreditation can be affirmed.

Additionally, after being granted applicant candidacy status, institutions are then re-judged on the Core Requirements, as well as ten Comprehensive Standards and eight Federal Requirements. These documents are submitted to the Commission on Colleges via the Compliance Certification. In order to be accredited by the Commission on Colleges, an

institution is required to conduct a comprehensive compliance audit prior to the filing of the Compliance Certification. The comprehensive compliance audit includes an assessment of all programs and courses offered by the institution on-campus and off-campus, and those offered through distance learning. The Compliance Certification, signed by the institution's chief executive officer and accreditation liaison, attests to the institution's honest assessment of compliance with the accreditation requirements of the Commission on Colleges (including Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements) as applied to all aspects of the institution.

Although COC publishes guidelines to all candidate colleges, more information is needed to assist the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education Colleges in the accreditation process. This information would allow technical colleges to prioritize resources, criteria, and processes to ensure initial success.

The Commission on Colleges meets biannually to decide on the reaffirmation of institutions completing the process within the past six months. From the data made available after the December 2004 meeting, the Commission on Colleges reviewed the reports of thirty institutions evaluated for reaffirmation of accreditation using the Principles of Accreditation. Following the review, twenty-seven institutions were cited in some area of a Core Requirement or Comprehensive Standard. From the reviews, fifteen institutions were reaffirmed without additional monitoring; eleven institutions were reaffirmed and requested to submit a monitoring report on compliance issues (COC, 2004). This study examined all Level I colleges that had been reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation since the implementation of the Principles of Accreditation. Reviewing the cited areas of deficiency by COC reviewers will assist all Level I colleges in focusing personnel and resources on common areas that have been cited during the

reaffirmation process. By concentrating on common deficient areas, all Level I colleges, including DTAE technical colleges, can save time, financial, and personnel resources by ensuring a focused process, and this will reduce areas being cited by COC and reduce requests for additional compliance monitoring.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the most common deficiencies by Georgia's technical colleges attempting to gain Commission on Colleges accreditation. The researcher sought to identify the specific areas of deficiencies to assist other technical colleges in the process.

#### Research Questions

The research questions that guided this project were:

1. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within Georgia's technical colleges?
2. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges?
3. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges, categorized by state?
4. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges, categorized by size?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual focus of this study was the investigation and analysis of the most common deficiencies in colleges attempting to obtain or maintain Commission on Colleges accreditation in Georgia. Bogue (1998) stated that accreditation was linked to both institutional quality and accountability in higher education. The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) defined accreditation as meeting a stated criteria of educational quality, and Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the current organization that brings together all forms of higher education accreditation in our country, also defines accreditation as ensuring institutions meet a standard of quality. Institutions of higher education have been using accreditation as a means of assessing quality in some fashion since the beginning of accreditation (Selden, 1960).

In the 1950s, a prescriptive set of evaluative standards was adopted by all of the regional associations (Davies, 1987). The process has changed some through the years, but all of the regional accrediting bodies still have a set of evaluative criteria to measure an institution's performance. According to Troutt (1981), the six regional associations all assess the following areas:

1. Institutional Purposes and Objectives
2. Organization and Administration
3. Financial Resources
4. Physical Resources
5. Library/Learning Center
6. Student Services
7. Faculty

## 8. Educational Programs

These eight areas encompass most if not all of the operating functions of an institution of higher education (Troutt, 1981). Although the process in place cannot guarantee quality, it does provide an accreditation process that can give some assurance of the quality of education offered. Even though accreditation and quality are linked, accreditation has rarely been studied from a conceptual perspective. However, remembering the definitions of accreditation and quality, several theories regarding quality can help lead to a better understanding of accreditation.

Astin's (1987) five perspectives of quality in higher education provide a bench mark for quality evaluation in colleges:

1. Reputation. This view assumes that quality cannot be measured directly and is best measured through the judgments of experts.
2. Resources. This approach emphasizes the human, financial and physical resources available to a program. The assumption is that if you have high quality equipment, highly qualified faculty, and good students, then a high quality program exists.
3. Outcomes. This theoretical approach to excellence is based on the quality of the product. This view would take into account student's ability to get a job and be successful upon graduation, employer satisfaction with the graduate, and other student accomplishments.
4. Content. This view defines the quality of the program in terms of what it teaches.
5. Talent Development or Value Added. This approach directs attention to what the program and institution has contributed to the student while enrolled. Programs are judged on how much they have added to the student's knowledge base or have helped develop the student in terms of personal development. Although this view has its supporters, many have been critical as this is a difficult aspect to measure.

In researching academic program reviews, Haworth and Conrad (1997) stated that most institutions are assessing program quality by adopting aspects of all five approaches. He further stated that quality has multiple characteristics and in turn, multiple indicators should be used for program evaluations.

Total Quality Management (TQM) or as it is also known, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), is a process designed to focus on customer service, preventing problems from arising, building commitment to quality, and promoting open decision making (Seymour, 1992). Seymour (1992) stated that when you think of TQM/CQI in terms of colleges and universities and program evaluation, it means to think differently about students, faculty and staff, and the business of how we educate students.

TQM/CQI management philosophy is credited with the rise of Japanese industry after World War II (Deming, 1986), and later the quality movement in American business in industry. As higher education began to be criticized during the 1980s for lack of accountability and inability to prove the quality of education they were providing, TQM/CQI began to make tremendous inroads into the higher education community (Seymour, 1991). Colleges and universities witnessed the impact on business and industry, the service industry and the government, and began to incorporate these theories into the management of higher education.

TQM/CQI is a systematic process that includes five stages of improvement and is based on six fundamental principles (Crosby, 1984). These stages are systematic and must occur in sequence to ensure results that can be implemented. Crosby (1984) stated that these stages are determining purpose, creating a positive environment, generating a success strategy, establishing goals and expectations, developing indicators of improvement, managing variation and improving processes (all throughout the process). He further explained the six fundamental

principles to be: a focus on the customer, continuous improvement, management by fact, benchmarking, a high value on people, and improvement of organizational structures.

TQM/CQI is customer-driven, which means that in education, the student is the customer (Seymour, 1991). Students and their employers are examples of external customers, while faculty and staff are internal customers. TQM/CQI demands a respect for all members of the organization with an expectation that all members have something to contribute to make the organization run better (Seymour, 1991). It has a major focus on prevention and problem-solving and that all team members must be brought into the decision making process.

As many colleges began to experiment with TQM/CQI, many stated that these principles had practical applications in the higher education environment (Seymour, 1996). The bulk of the literature available seemed to focus on efforts and case studies of individual colleges attempting to implement these quality initiatives. Seymour (1991) stated that TQM/CQI made most of its inroads early and its contributions were in the administrative area.

However, during these periods of implementation, these quality principles were also applied as colleges and universities attempted to use these standards for program evaluation (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004). Srikanthan and Dalrymple, (2004) stated that TQM/CQI models concentrating on program evaluation focused on two points, the student learning experience and the collaboration process. This model holds that program quality in a higher education setting should strongly correlate to the quality of the learning experience. Furthermore, the learning experience requires a dialogue between the learners and the instructors about the nature and scope of their educational experience.

### Significance of the Study

A study collecting data on the most common deficiencies from COC reviews is beneficial in that data collected and findings shared can provide a basis for future decisions by other Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education technical colleges. Due to limited resources, DTAE technical colleges would benefit from a synopsis of criteria that have caused problems in recent visits. This information could save time and money by allowing the institution to focus efforts on items likely to cause problems. Overall, mixed results by DTAE colleges in pursuing COC accreditation emphasizes the need for more analysis and exploration.

### Summary

The Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education has adopted a strategic goal for all member colleges to become accredited by the Commission on Colleges (Department of Technical and Adult Education, n.d.). This process has met with mixed results as some technical colleges have achieved COC accreditation, while others have not yet been able to earn this status. With the current and projected list of technical colleges attempting to achieve COC accreditation, the need to research and offer assistance in the most common problem areas in technical colleges in Georgia and all Level I colleges is essential.

Quality is an important part of the accreditation process. Accreditation is a status granted to an educational institute or program that has been found to meet or exceed stated evaluative criteria of educational quality (Council on Higher Education Accreditation, 2006). This study examined the literature related to quality and the accreditation process.

The findings of this study can be used as a guideline for the preparation and development of future attempts at accreditation by a Level I college. This study is a useful addition to the

body by offering helpful and practical information when preparing to start the COC accreditation process.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the most common deficiencies among Georgia technical colleges in attempting to gain and/or maintain COC accreditation. The goal is for technical colleges in Georgia beginning and currently in the process of achieving accreditation can focus their efforts on areas that have been identified as problems at similar institutions since 2003. This chapter presents the review of the related literature in three sections—the history of accreditation, the development of the technical college system in Georgia, and accreditation, education and quality.

In the first part of the chapter, the literature related to the development of accreditation is reviewed. Minimal scholarly work exists on the history of accreditation in this country, despite its enormous importance and influence (Selden, 1960). However, it is useful to review the history of accreditation to determine the original purpose, to understand how accreditation grew and developed, and to understand its current role.

The development of the technical education system in Georgia is the second area of research for this chapter. To understand why it is now a priority for technical colleges in Georgia to achieve COC accreditation, a review of the history of the technical college system of Georgia was conducted. The progression and development of Georgia's locally governed area vocational schools to a technical college system now granting associate degrees was reviewed.

The final area of literature reviewed focused on accreditation and quality. The United States Department of Education (n.d.) stated that “Accreditation is the process used in U.S.

education to ensure that . . . postsecondary institutions, and other education providers meet, and maintain, minimum standards of quality and integrity regarding academics, administration, and related services." Simmons (1993) stated that much of what is being done today by the community and technical college sector is consistent with the overall goal of accreditation to promote education quality and excellence. This section of the chapter will look at the theoretical frameworks that form the foundation of these activities.

### History of Accreditation

According to Selden (1960), the roots of accreditation are very deep from the early years of the history of our nation. However, during the past 100 years, accreditation has grown and transitioned into broader responsibilities. In reviewing accreditation, it is necessary to understand the history and development of accreditation, specifically as it relates to postsecondary institutions.

Although accreditation has had an important impact on higher education in this country, it has not received similar treatment in scholarly works on education. Selden (1960) believed that the lack of attention is improper based on the influence accreditation has had in higher education:

Of the hundreds and hundreds of volumes written about higher education in the United States, it is surprising to note that no more than passing reference, if any at all, is made to accrediting, accreditation, or accreditation, as it is variously called. This lack of attention is incongruous when one appreciates how extensively accrediting has influenced the development of higher education in this country. It is even more anomalous when one reflects on the passionate arguments and disagreements it has caused. (p. 2)

Selden (1960) believed the beginning of accreditation in this country was in the late 1700's. In 1787, lawmakers in New York enacted legislation that required members of the New York State Board of Regents to visit every College in the state once a year and report yearly to the Legislature (Selden, 1960). From this legislation, the foundations for accrediting were laid a hundred years before it was developed as an answer to the growing diversity of education and the lack of coordination among the multiplying number of high schools and colleges.

Until the 1900's, there was generally no clear distinction between secondary schools and colleges (Selden, 1960). No standards for postsecondary training existed. While many other countries had education agencies that enforced national standards, the federal government in the United States did not involve itself in education, particularly higher education. Selden (1960) stated that the early view of government was that education was not specifically a national responsibility and the governance of education was viewed as a state responsibility. State governments chartered universities, but there was little other involvement and few restrictions on establishing colleges.

The earliest American colleges offered a common curriculum geared toward religious subjects, and most early institutions were established to prepare for the ministry (Geiger, 1970). American colleges were governed by independent boards of trustees. This reflected the American tradition of separation of church and state.

Selden (1960) noted that "as a result of a singular combination of social forces, (accreditation) has developed in the United States in marked contrast to the system employed in all other countries of the world". According to Young, (1983) some of the social forces were the growth in industry and subsequent societal ills, a belief in capitalism and individualism, and reform movements such as populism and progressivism.

In 1873, Johns Hopkins University was founded. This was the first of what would turn out to be many American institutions that were influenced by the University of Berlin. The University of Berlin was established in 1810 with government support and under government control and “epitomized the new emphasis on scholarship, research and pure knowledge” (Selden, 1960).

By the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century higher education was becoming a growth industry (Brickman & Lehrer, 1962). During this same time frame, a number of what would prove to be less reputable institutions, especially medical schools, were being established. Throughout the world, the Industrial Revolution was continuing and technology was rapidly expanding. In the 1880’s, Harvard began to move away from the “classical” curriculum for all students to an “elective” system (Selden, 1960). No standardization existed among any colleges and no minimum education standards or guidelines existed. Brickman and Lehrer (1962) list other significant events that molded higher education and affected accreditation:

1. 1890—Passage of the second Land-Grant College Act, providing for black institutions.
2. 1895—Founding of the North Central and Southern regional associations.
3. 1900—Founding of the Association of American Universities, the Association of American Law Schools, and the College Entrance Examination Board.
4. 1901—Establishment of the Joliet (Illinois) Junior College, the first permanent junior college.
5. 1905—Creation of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
6. 1910—Publication of Abraham Flexner’s report, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*.

7. 1914—Passage of the Smith-Lever Act, authorizing extension programs; founding of the Association of American Colleges.

During this time, since no organization regulated what was to be called a “college”, there was some confusion about what constituted the right to be called a “college” (Selden, 1960). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching was founded in 1905 and it adopted the definition used by the New York Board of Regents. It described a college as having a minimum of six full-time professors, four years of coursework, an admission requirement equivalent to four years of high school, and a minimum amount of support from taxes or an endowment (Orlans, 1975).

Due to the public’s concern about distinctions between secondary and higher education, as well as complaints about institutions, educators began to take action. One of the initial purposes of accreditation was viewed as a way to provide a minimum standard of quality in higher education for the protection of consumers (Davies, 1987). Selden (1960) stated that accreditation, like other movements at the time, began as a reform movement. Individual state governments and the federal government stayed out of the education arena, and independent organizations of college faculty and administrators began to take responsibility for ensuring that students received an adequate education.

In 1885, the first regional education association, the New England Association of Colleges and Schools, was formed (Andersen, 1978). In 1895, the accrediting body of the southern colleges, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools was formed. Andersen (1978) chronicled the history of the other regional associations that followed:

1. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, founded in 1887 as the College Association of Pennsylvania;

2. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, also founded in 1895;
3. The Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, established in 1917; and
4. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which began as a discussion group in 1924, and became an accrediting body in 1948.

Accreditation began to emerge as a national phenomenon in August 1906. According to Young (1983), during this time, representatives from the four existing regional associations met and agreed to:

1. Recommend that the regional associations have their member colleges accept certificates from accredited schools in other regions.
2. Encourage the regional associations not yet doing so to organize “a college entrance certificate board or a commission for accrediting school.”
3. Propose the development of common definitions and standards.
4. Establish a permanent commission “for the purpose of considering, from time to time, entrance requirements and matters of mutual interest to colleges and preparatory schools.”

From this developed the National Conference Committee of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools (Young, 1983). This group met sporadically over the next several years with the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the United States Commissioner of Education (Young, 1983). From these meetings and through the expansion and linking of regional associations, developed the sanctioning of accreditation, first at the secondary level and then at the postsecondary level.

During this same time frame, two other important developments related to accreditation occurred. The first began when the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary

Schools decided to start accrediting member colleges. Standards were developed in 1909, the process was set in motion in 1910, and the first approved list of accredited schools appeared in 1913 (Pfnister, 1983).

Also during this time, the American Medical Association (AMA) established its Council on Medical Education in 1904, developed a rating system of medical schools in 1905, initiated inspections in 1906, and issued the first classifications of institutions in 1907 (American Medical Association, 1960). Although these early efforts of the AMA were not accreditation as it is today, it did evolve into specialized accreditation and established a pattern that would be followed by most other major professional organizations. The Council on Medical Education adopted an “ideal standard” with the recommendation that medical schools of this country should eventually require “(1) preliminary education sufficient to enable the candidate to enter our recognized universities; (2) a five-year medical course: the first year devoted to physics, chemistry, and biology; the next two years to laboratory sciences of anatomy, physiology, pathology, and pharmacology, and two years to the clinical branches, with close contact with patients in both dispensary and hospital; (3) a sixth year as an intern in the hospital” (American Medical Association, 1960).

Within an approximate 10 year period, a new and different concept of accreditation emerged, was adopted and put into operation by colleges and universities, given the attention of major professional organizations and received the support of the higher education community. Geiger (1970) noted that within a twenty-year period, accreditation took another major leap forward, led by the North Central Association. In 1929, it developed a research project involving fifty-seven institutions. More important, according to Geiger (1970), the committee put forth a newly developed policy that undergirds regional and professional accrediting to this day. The

committee's report stated: "An institution will be judged for (accreditation) upon the basis of the total pattern it presents as an institution of higher education . . .it is recognized that wide variations will appear . . .the facilities and activities of an institution will be judged in terms of its purposes its seeks to serve" (Geiger, 1970, p. 26). This new concept, that an institution would be reviewed in terms of its own purposes and not by an arbitrary set of standards, was adopted by the North Central Association and gradually by the other regional associations and then a growing number of professional associations. This led to the establishment of the self-study process (Geiger, 1970).

Other changes in higher education and American society have affected the accreditation process. Terms such as postsecondary education are suggested to be used now instead of higher education. Higher education previously and commonly meant degree-granting colleges and universities offering traditional academic programs to traditional age (recent high school graduate), full-time students. The term postsecondary education has come to embrace an expanding variety of institutions, programs, and delivery systems in many settings with various modes of instructional delivery to an ethnically diverse group of learners of all ages (Davies, 1970). Many "traditional" colleges and universities now offer a number of educational activities not directly related to producing graduates with degrees. Examples of these are continuing education courses for the general population, short-term certificate training, and specialized training for business and industry. Also, a number of "nontraditional" institutions are beginning to award credit degrees as well as offer the same range of noncredit courses—continuing education, certificate training and training for business and industry. The various types of postsecondary training has sometimes been a challenge for accrediting agencies in dealing with two year community and technical colleges (Palinchak, 1993).

Accreditation was created originally by educators for educators (Palinchak, 1993). Different accrediting associations emerged in different geographic regions throughout America. The six regional accrediting agencies are autonomous separate commissions with their own standards and rules of operation (Bloland, 1999). These six regional accrediting agencies have had an enormous influence on higher education in this country, as the majority of degree granting institutions are accredited by one of these six regional accreditation agencies:

From the very beginning, as accreditation was gaining support throughout the country, it had its critics. Young (1983) indicated that the Chancellor of the University of Buffalo was one of the earliest and most severe critics of accreditation. In 1939, he delivered a speech entitled “Seven Devils in Exchange for One” in which he described accreditors as irresponsible outsiders with selfish individual differences.

Yet, all of the criticism became moot when, in 1952, the United States Office of Education required that all higher education institutions be accredited to receive funding under the Veterans Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill (Selden, 1960). Selden (1960) stated this legislation occurred because many colleges were abusing funds distributed to thousands of veterans who after returning home from World War II took advantage of the first GI Bill and attended college. Orlans (1975) described this as one of the most significant events ever to affect accreditation. This was due to the large number of individuals going to college and receiving funding from the GI Bill. The amounts of revenue were so large that colleges and universities could not afford to not be able to participate in this program. After this ruling from the Office of Education, much controversy began to be whether accreditation was still “voluntary”.

According to Prarie and Chamberlain (1994), the independence of accrediting agencies is derived from the fact that the government “recognizes, rather than regulates, the accrediting

process” (p.4). Historically, the government has left the process of reviewing the quality of college and universities to the accrediting associations. Although the government has had brief flirtations with intervention, generally it has favored a hands-off approach.

Institutional accreditation can be traced back to the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (Geiger, 1970). In 1913, this organization released a list of accredited colleges and universities (Selden & Porter, 1977). The need for accreditation came about because no clear consensus existed on what constituted a college or university. As they were formed, the other regional accrediting bodies developed similar lists. As the regional accrediting bodies were growing and evolving, it was decided that a need existed to protect member institutions from other institutions that were inadequate or deficient. From this need came a requirement that member institutions would be evaluated by certain standards and inspected to ensure that they met those standards. By the early 1950s, all regional accrediting agencies required as a condition of membership an institution meet certain established accreditation requirements (Selden & Porter, 1977).

A result of all of these actions was that regional accreditation came to be known as a means of identifying “better” schools (Palinchak, 1993). Those schools that adhered to certain standards were deemed reputable because they met certain standards. Therefore, it was thought that those students could transfer to other regional colleges because of their accreditation, which guaranteed adherence to those established criteria (Palinchak, 1993). So, by the early 1950s, a firm system of six postsecondary regional accrediting agencies that encompassed the United States came to be in place with the developing national accreditation agencies to accredit other types of postsecondary education (Palinchak, 1993).

The road that has taken accreditation to its place today has been a path full of twists and turns. From the founding of Harvard in 1636 to the creation of the Council on Higher Education in 1996, the purposes of accreditation have continued to change and evolve. The foundation for understanding accreditation is rooted in its beginnings based on voluntary self-regulation. Selden (1960) stated that accreditation is essentially a process by which universities voluntarily decided to regulate themselves. He further stated that the four major purposes of accreditation are to: (a) determine admissions criteria, (b) maintain minimum academic standards, (c) stimulate institutional self-improvement, and (d) serve as a countervailing force to external and internal pressures that are placed on colleges and universities. Young (1983) stated accreditation had four basic characteristics: (a) prevailing sense of volunteerism, (b) strong tradition of self-regulation, (c) reliance on evaluation techniques, and (v) primary concern with quality. Bender (1983) added that accreditation should: (a) benefit the public interest, (b) heighten educational quality, and (c) emphasize its voluntary, self-regulatory and nongovernmental character.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation also publishes its version of the definition of accreditation, and its definition links accreditation with quality. The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is private, nonprofit, national organization that was founded several years after the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (a previous national organization) dissolved (Bloland, 1999). As the largest national educational organization, CHEA's purpose is to persuade turf-oriented accrediting agencies to work together, fend off federal efforts to place more controls on accrediting agencies, and explain to college presidents why and how accreditation is changing (McMurtrie, 1999). According to CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2005), accreditation is "the process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and higher education programs for

quality assurance and quality improvement. Success results in an accredited institution and/or program” (p.5).

### Technical Education in Georgia

According to Rouse (1994), approximately one-third of all high school graduates will attend a community or technical college at some point in their lives. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005), stated one-half of all students taking courses at a community or technical college do not matriculate to a four year degree. Kane and Rouse (1999) believed this was due to the changing purpose of the traditional community college and the large number of two year college students enrolling in technical/vocational programs in order to go directly into the job market. Levin (2000) stated that at the dawn of the twenty first century, community and technical colleges possess new and similar economic missions. Increasingly, scholarly literature (Kane & Rouse, 2000; Levin, 2000) refers to and uses the terms community college and technical college interchangeably.

Cohen and Brawer (1996) placed the development of the community college in context with the growth of all education in this country during the twentieth century. As more secondary schools were being developed and growing, the need for postsecondary education increased. Several prominent education figures suggested that colleges and universities should abandon their freshmen and sophomore classes and delegate those to a new set of institutions to be developed called junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Kane and Rouse, 2000). Some suggested that universities would not be true research centers until they abandoned lower level education while others suggested following the European system. That is, the universities would be responsible for the higher order courses, while the junior colleges would be responsible for

general education and vocational course preparation (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Kane & Rouse, 2000).

In the early part of the 1900's, William Raney Harper, the founding President of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, Superintendent of Joliet High School, met to design a local junior college based on the European model (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Kane & Rouse, 2000). This new school was modeled after the German Gymnasium. In Germany, the Gymnasium provided intensive studying in languages, mathematics and the sciences (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). This new junior college was designed to provide preparatory training for later studies at a four year college and university (Kane and Rouse, 2000).

Also occurring in the early of the twentieth century was the formation of formalized vocation education in this country (Kincheloe, 1999). The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 provided funding for vocational education and provided specifications about teacher credentials for vocational education (Lynch, 1998). One of the authors of this legislation was a Senator from Georgia, Hoke Smith (DTAE, 2003). He recognized that if the state of Georgia was to make economic progress that action needed to be taken to provide proper education to high school and postsecondary students in vocational areas (DTAE, 2003). Therefore, the legislation was somewhat prescriptive in that it required each state to establish a State Board for vocational education in order to receive funds and required each State Board to establish a plan (United States Department of Education, n.d.):

Showing the kinds of vocational education for which it is proposed that the appropriation shall be used; the kinds of schools and equipment; courses of study; methods of instruction; qualifications of teachers; . . . plans for the training of teachers . . . Such plans shall be submitted by the State Board to the Federal Board of Vocational Education. The

State Board shall make an annual report to the Federal Board for Vocational Education...on the work done in the State and the receipts and expenditures of money under the provisions of this Act.(Section 8)

This legislation, along with the economic condition of the United States at the time of its passage, fueled unprecedented growth in community colleges and technical and vocational education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Kincheloe, 1999).

The state of Georgia continued to progress in developing vocational and technical education programs. In 1943, the State Board of Education approved funds for a system of Area Trade Schools and in 1944, the first school opened in Clarkesville, the North Georgia Trade and Vocational School (DTAE, 2003). Four years later, the South Georgia Trade and Vocational School opened in Americus (DTAE, 2003).

The passage of the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 and the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 were two of the most significant events ever to affect higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Orlans, 1975; Selden, 1960). The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the first G.I. Bill, allowed millions who would have flooded the labor market to instead opt for education, which reduced joblessness during the demobilization period (Selden, 1960). Cohen and Brawer (1996) stated that while they did not flood the job market, they did flood community and technical colleges spiking enrollment. When they did enter the labor market, most were better prepared to contribute to the support of their families and society (Selden, 1960). The Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 was significant in that it reinstated the G.I. Bill for veterans returning from Korea, and made the G.I. Bill a permanent part of the military (Veteran's Affairs, n.d.).

Elected officials in Georgia watched as veterans returning from Korea were unable to understand the increasing mechanization of agriculture and as demand for greater technical training was developing (DTAE, 2003). In the late 1950's, the State Board of Education approved policies for establishing around the state what would be called Area Vocational-Technical School, and by the late 1960's, nineteen schools had opened around the state (DTAE, 2003). Breeden (2003) stated that the next major landmark for Georgia was in 1984, when the State Board of Postsecondary Vocational Education was created. This ultimately led to the creation of the Department of Technical and Adult Education in 1988, and adult literacy and Georgia's Quick Start economic development programs were transferred to DTAE in the same year (DTAE, 2003).

By the year 2000, at the time of Georgia's A+ Education Reform Act, thirty four technical institutes with numerous satellite campuses existed (DTAE, 2003). The A+ Education Reform Act changed the name of technical institutes to technical colleges and all thirty four technical colleges began offering associate degrees (Breeden, 2003). The need for technical training, combined with statewide initiatives such as the Helping Outstanding Pupils Excel (HOPE) grant and scholarship program have helped to maintain steady enrollment growth in the technical college system. After all technical colleges in the state began offering associate degrees, enrollment grew by 36% statewide in the two years following that change (DTAE, 2005).

Table 1

*10 Year Enrollment Data of the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education*

Year	Credit Enrollment	Percentage increase/decrease over previous year
2005	155,126	-2.9

2004	159,835	4.2
2003	153,444	8
2002	142,074	19.90
2001	118,496	17.10
2000	101,194	8.31
1999	93,431	5.21
1998	88,801	9.09
1997	81,398	8.67
1996	74,907	8.05
1995	69,327	8.15

After Georgia's public technical colleges began offering associate degrees, a strategic direction developed for technical colleges to seek Commission on Colleges accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (DTAE, 2002). This would allow greater transfer opportunities for the thousands of students who were enrolling in Georgia's technical college system. However, this would generally be done without any additional staff or any additional guidance or assistance from the central office. Thus arose some of the initial, early difficulties of technical colleges attempting to gain COC accreditation.

#### Analysis and Theory Education: Quality and Accreditation

Although accreditation is more than a century old, it has been rarely analyzed, particularly from a theoretical perspective. However, an examination of the literature reveals several theories that can lead to a better understanding of accreditation and theoretical

frameworks that are related to accreditation. First, however, it is essential to have a better understanding of quality.

### *Definition of Quality*

Although quality seems like it would be an easy concept to identify and it seems like something all educational institutions want to obtain, it is nevertheless somewhat difficult to define. In part because education accreditation is a self-regulated process, Davies (1987) wrote that colleges and universities have become confident enough to declare that “quality is whatever we in higher education think it is” (pg. 37). Colleges and universities interpret and define quality by numerous different methods and evaluative processes.

Although quality is a major part of the accreditation process, reaching a definition that all colleges and universities agree on is difficult to achieve. While a dictionary may define quality as being an inherent or distinguishing characteristic, Council on Higher Education Accreditation defines quality as fitness for purpose, i.e., meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2005). The Council on Higher Education Accreditation definition seems to be derived from well known quality theorists such as Deming (Glidden, 1996).

A search for definitions of quality brings the names of Crosby and Deming to the forefront. Crosby (1984) defined quality as conformance to specifications (fit for use), a product or service that meets design specifications is a quality product (even if it is not what the customer wants, fitness is defined by the customer). Deming (1986) stated that a quality organization is one that improves continuously. Although these definitions of quality are generally thought of in business terms, they have applicable meaning for education as well.

*Focus on Quality*

In recent years, higher education has come under increased scrutiny on the issues of accountability and quality. Derek Bok (1992), a former president of Harvard University stated:

With the passage of time, the public is beginning to catch on to our shortcomings. They may not have it quite right ... but they are right about our priorities, and they do not like what they see. All across the country they hear about enterprises of every kind facing competitive challenges and having to pay much closer attention to the quality of everything they do. That is the revolution that is sweeping this country; the public naturally expects us to participate. And a lot of us are not. ... And we are not doing a lot to change our underlying priorities – at least in our leading universities, which, for better or worse, set the standards by which all of higher education gets judged. ... American higher education, by universal acclaim, remains the finest of its kind in the world. ... we need to persuade the public – but most of all ourselves – that we do make the quality of education a priority second to none. (p. 18)

Bok's article painted part of the picture of the call for increased accountability and quality during the 1990s. During this same year, the United States Congress took eight months to reauthorize the 1965 Higher Education Act (Glidden, 1996). Glidden (1996) wrote that Congress exhibited little to no confidence in regional accrediting agencies and their ability to handle problems and didn't really seem to understand what accreditation does, how it works, and whether it is effective. It was during this reauthorization that Congress authorized the establishment of State Postsecondary Review Entities (SPREs) in each state to review postsecondary institutions with high loan default rates (Bloland, 1999). Furthermore, in response to growing dissatisfaction with accrediting agencies, they passed legislation requiring the

associations to demonstrate their ability to assess institutional quality. According to the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act:

The agency maintains a systematic program of review designed to ensure that its criteria and standards are valid and reliable indicators of quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits and are relevant to the education or training needs of affected students. (United States Department of Education, [§602.23(b)(5)])

Because of the prescriptive nature of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, colleges and universities lost confidence in the ability of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation to protect its accreditation interests (Glidden, 1996). Accordingly, they withdrew financial support of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and it had a quick demise (Glidden, 1996). This led directly to the creation of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation. The new lobbying agency, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, worked closely with the next Congress, and the State Postsecondary Review Entities were dissolved by legislation (Glidden, 1996). However, this legislative interference from Congress had put accrediting agencies, colleges and universities on notice and according to Glidden (1996) that “Either you do it right and assure us that you’re measuring quality . . .or we’ll do it ourselves” (p. 22).

### *Quality and Accreditation*

Although it may not be well understood by some and the process highly criticized by others, most would agree that accreditation has meant higher standards and greater quality for institutions of higher education in this country (Bender, 1983). Some argue and criticize that accreditation agencies assume notions of quality based on meeting certain evaluative criteria

through the self-evaluation process, rather than direct assessment of student learning outcomes (Troutt, 1981). Others argue that accrediting agencies can not and should not directly assess student outcomes because this would infringe on institutional autonomy (Troutt, 1981).

Boland (1999) stated that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the oversight threats from Congress caused the six regional accrediting agencies to decide to better authenticate the quality of the institutions they accredit, as well as request the colleges and universities to provide evidence of student learning outcomes (Boland, 1999). Glidden (1996) stated that responding to the legislative interference and the call for more accountability, accrediting bodies revised their evaluative criteria to reflect the growing concerns about quality. Troutt (1981) was among those who argued that a better approach to evaluation was needed. Instead of just evaluating the structure and process of the institution, that accrediting agencies should revise their criteria to measure and provide adequate assurance of educational quality. Young (1980) stated that the current process needed to focus more on educational outcomes. They contended the best way to evaluate institutions was to emphasize the results of the educational process, rather than the process itself. Pressured by all sides, accrediting bodies added evaluative criteria that include student learning outcomes, a quality measurement indicator (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, Gaffney, 2001).

### *Evaluative Criteria*

Bogue (1998) stated that accreditation and quality are linked in higher education. While a viable organization, COPA defined accreditation as meeting a stated criteria of educational quality, and CHEA, the current organization that brings together all forms of higher education accreditation in our country, also states that accreditation is a method of ensuring institutions meet a standard of quality. CHEA (2006) defined accreditation as a review of the quality of

higher education institutions and programs. It further stated that it is one of the major ways that students, families and government officials know that an institution or program provides a quality education (2006). Institutions of higher education have been using accreditation as a means of assessing quality in some fashion since the beginning of accreditation (Selden, 1960).

In the 1950s, a more prescriptive set of evaluative standards was adopted by all of the regional associations (Davies, 1987). The process has changed some through the year, but all of the regional accrediting bodies still have a set of evaluative criteria to measure an institution's performance. According to Troutt (1981), the six regional associations all assess the following areas:

1. Institutional Purposes and Objectives
2. Organization and Administration
3. Financial Resources
4. Physical Resources
5. Library/Learning Center
6. Student Services
7. Faculty
8. Educational Programs

These eight areas encompass most if not all of the operating functions of an institution of higher education (Troutt, 1981). Although the process in place cannot guarantee quality, it does provide an accreditation process that can give some assurance of the quality of education offered.

The regional accrediting body that will be the focus of this study is the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This regional body accredits institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina,

North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. In the mid 1990s, the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) began a process of revising its Criteria for Accreditation. The result was the new Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (2004). This new handbook plainly stated that COC expects institutions to focus on enhancing the quality of their programs and services (Commission on Colleges, 2004).

In this country, colleges and universities have utilized the accreditation process to assess institutional quality (Bogue, 1998). In recent years, the higher education community has come under more scrutiny in terms of accountability and quality in education (Bogue, 1998). Quality seems to be something that all institutions of higher education want to attain, but it is sometimes an elusive concept and its definition is not easily understood.

Quality is an important aspect of accreditation, and accreditation is also an evaluation mechanism (Bogue, 1998). Bogue (1998) stated different approaches to evaluation are based on different theories and are practiced differently. Troutt (1981) stated in practice, many evaluations combine different approaches.

Although accreditation and quality are linked, accreditation has rarely been studied from a theoretical perspective. However, remembering the definitions of accreditation and quality, several theories regarding quality can help lead to a better understanding of accreditation.

#### *Bogue Theories of Quality Improvement*

In 1998, Bogue postulated three theories of quality in education:

1. The Theory of Limited Supply. Bogue (1998) characterized some academicians as holding a superior attitude toward others. As an example, those who think that only high-cost, highly selective colleges, or those colleges with national reputations or vast resources have quality. So, in this theory, quality is limited and only selected

institutions will have a high level of quality. Bogue (1998) quoted Logan Wilson's statement that "Excellence, by definition, is a state only the few rather than the many can attain" (p.vii) to illustrate this theory. He further illustrated this point by reminding us of the popularity of the *U.S. News and World Report* annual ranking of American colleges.

2. The Theory of Quality Within Mission. In contrast to his first theory that only colleges with vast resources can have quality, this theory holds that any college that is achieving its mission can be a quality institution (Bogue, 1998). However, a college must demonstrate that quality. He quoted Green's assertion that a "high quality institution is one that clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is effective in meeting the goals that it has set for itself" (1994, p 15).
3. The Theory of Value-Added. This theory is based on Astin's "talent development" theory of excellence (Bogue, 1998). It holds that the most quality institutions are the ones that make the most difference in the life of the student. What changes occurred in the student's skill, knowledge and attitude? How much more has that student developed as an individual? This theory holds that these are the questions that should determine a quality institution.

Although Bogue stated that you can think about quality from these three perspectives, I think that is an oversimplification of quality theories. While it may be true that larger colleges with more financial resources have more staff, are able to perform more research and provide more services, it may also be true that size does not matter. Smaller, financially struggling liberal arts colleges may provide just as much of an education to a student as the college with the largest financial endowment in this country. Although accreditation has generally always

focused on the mission of the college (Theory of Quality Within Mission), as a result of events during the 1990s, it has added evaluative criteria regarding student learning outcomes (The Theory of Value-Added). These are theories that provide a foundation for quality improvement within colleges and are inextricably linked to criteria used by accrediting agencies.

### *Tierney Theory for Quality Improvement*

In 1998, Tierney completed his research on improving the quality of colleges and universities and published his model for excellence – a Responsive University. This model was based on the idea that “. . . the public . . . will judge the university in terms of the quality of their relationships . . .and the quality of the outcomes . . . to survive and thrive . . .universities will have to be responsive and service oriented” (p. 163). He stated that the academic staff of institutions of higher learning should regularly meet and review shifts in students and needs. He believed that the mission of an institution should be evolving as your students, resources and departmental goals evolve (Tierney, 1998). The academic staff should annually review its goals to continually be responsive to the needs of students.

Tierney (1998) also stated that relationships are a very important part of higher education and enhancing quality. He stated that partnerships with the government and business and industry are needed to ensure the institution is aligned with public purpose. Student learning outcomes will become more important as the aforementioned relationships are developed to make sure that colleges and universities are producing students ready for a productive life in society.

The Responsive University theory is among many theories of recent years regarding quality and higher education that attempt to be more holistic in an effort to address both service and pedagogical needs (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004). This proposed model for educational

quality management tries to cover all aspects of an institution, just as the evaluative criteria used by the regional accrediting bodies attempts to be thorough in reviewing an institution.

*Theories of Evaluation – Worthen, Sanders and Fitzpatrick*

In their book, *Program Evaluation – Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines*, Worthen, Sanders and Fitzpatrick (1997) identified six types of evaluation:

1. Objectives-oriented. The focus in this theory is on ensuring that your goals and objectives are clearly stated and measuring how your project has done in reaching those goals and objectives. This approach is useful if measuring outcomes is the main purpose of the evaluation.
2. Management-oriented. The focus here is to identify and provide the type of information needed by program directors for better management of a program.
3. Consumer-oriented. This evaluation theory approach is useful in helping consumers to be more informed and make better decisions. It can be useful in helping consumer choose among different services.
4. Expertise-oriented. The focus of this evaluative approach is the judgment and expertise of the experts. Their opinion is the main source of information. This theory can be useful in providing a way to evaluate something complex.
5. Adversary-oriented. This approach brings out arguments for or against a project. Different perspectives are deliberately used to make better judgments.
6. Participant-oriented. In this theoretical approach, program participants and stakeholders are key sources of questions and information. Those being evaluated are directly involved in shaping the evaluation.

According to Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997), program accreditation is a type of expertise-oriented evaluation. However, they believed program evaluation should emanate from several different theoretical approaches including, objectives-oriented, management-oriented and participant-oriented. They believe that relying solely on expertise-oriented can lead to bias and a lack of effective input. They stated that their concern is:

The public suspicion that review by one's peer is inherently conservative, potentially incestuous, and subject to possible conflicts of interest. If evaluators are drawn from the ranks of the discipline or profession to be evaluated, there are decided risks.

Socialization within any groups tends to blunt the important characteristic of detachment. Assumptions and practices that would be questioned by an outsider may be taken for granted. (p. 133)

#### *Theories of Evaluation – Student Outcomes*

Due to political and other pressures, the regional accrediting agencies added evaluative criteria regarding student outcomes, in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ewell, 1997). The national mood that wanted student-centered and learning-orientated accreditation standards was now linked inextricably with student outcomes assessment and accreditation (Dill, Massy, Williams & Cook, 1996). With this linkage, a national educational discussion began to emerge on these topics.

Early in the 1980s, individual pioneers such as Banta at the University of Tennessee had begun implementing student learning outcomes as an assessment method before calls for reform in higher education (Banta, 1985). Banta and other pioneers cleared the road for a national emphasis on student-centered learning. The student-centered learning or learner-centered theory approach focuses on the outcomes of the educational process (Dill, Massy, William & Cook,

1996). The role of the student is one of an active participant who is encouraged to become engaged in the learning process. This student-centered process theoretically embraces continued improvement in the quality of learning.

Ewell (1997) defined student learning outcomes as a change or consequence that comes as a result of enrollment in a particular educational institution and involvement in one of its educational programs. This included time in an academic classroom as involvement in student activities, living on campus, student-faculty interaction and other collegiate environmental factors (Astin, 1985). Evaluating programs from the theory of student learning outcomes provides a construct that can help to focus the energies of a particular division (Student Affairs) or a particular academic program on common goals.

#### *Astin's Five Notions of Quality*

Astin (1985) believed that postsecondary education institutions have typically defined quality in ways that have not been beneficial:

There are several conceptions of excellence that are *implicit* in our time-honored educational policies and practices. . . They are not necessarily consistent with the educational mission of institutions, they interfere with our efforts to expand *educational* opportunity, and their use does not promote greater excellence in the system as a whole.

(p. ix., Author's italics)

For the purposes of this study, I believe Astin's (1987) five perspectives of quality in higher education provide a benchmark for quality evaluation in colleges:

1. Reputation. This view assumes that quality cannot be measured directly and is best measured through the judgments of experts.

2. Resources. This approach emphasizes the human, financial and physical resources available to a program. The assumption is that if you have high quality equipment, highly qualified faculty, and good students, then a high quality program exists.
3. Outcomes. This theoretical approach to excellence is based on the quality of the product. This view would take into account a student's ability to get a job and be successful upon graduation, employer satisfaction with the graduate, and other student accomplishments.
4. Content. This view defines the quality of the program in terms of what it teaches.
5. Talent Development or Value Added. This approach directs attention to what the program and institution has contributed to the student while enrolled. Colleges and programs are judged on how much they have added to the student's knowledge base or have helped develop the student in terms of personal development. Although this view has its supporters, many have been critical as this is a difficult aspect to measure.

Astin (1985) suggested that talent development should have more to do with the student and faculty, than a sports program or a ranking by a magazine:

The talent development view of quality and excellence emphasizes the educational impact of the institution on its students and faculty members. Its basic premise is that true excellence lies in the institution's ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance their intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives. The most excellent institutions are, in this view, those that have the greatest impact—"add the most value," as economists would say-on the student's knowledge and personal development and on the faculty member's scholarly and pedagogical ability and productivity. (p.61)

Haworth and Conrad (1997) agreed with some aspects of Astin's talent development model, but believe that talent development alone is too narrow a measurement of quality. In researching academic program reviews, they stated that most institutions are assessing program quality by adopting aspects of all five approaches. They further stated that quality has multiple characteristics and in turn, multiple indicators should be used for program evaluations.

#### *Theories of Evaluation – TQM/CQI*

Total Quality Management (TQM) or as it is also known, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), is a process designed to focus on customer service, preventing problems from arising, building commitment to quality, and promoting open decision making (Seymour, 1992). Seymour (1992) stated that when you think of TQM/CQI in terms of colleges and universities and program evaluation, it means we need to think differently about students, faculty and staff, and the business of how we educate students.

This management philosophy is credited with the rise of Japanese industry after World War II (Deming, 1986), and later the quality movement in American business in industry. As higher education began to be criticized during the 1980s for lack of accountability and inability to prove the quality of education they were providing, TQM/CQI began to make tremendous inroads into the higher education community (Seymour, 1991). Colleges and universities witnessed the impact on business and industry, the service industry and the government, and began to incorporate these theories into the management of high education.

TQM/CQI is a systematic process that includes five stages of improvement and is based on six fundamental principles (Crosby, 1984). These stages are systematic and must occur in sequence to ensure results that can be implemented. Crosby (1994) states that these stages are determining purpose, creating a positive environment, generating a success strategy, establishing

goals and expectations, developing indicators of improvement, managing variation and improving processes (all throughout the process). He further explained the six fundamental principles on which it is based: a focus on the customer, continuous improvement, management by fact, benchmarking, a high value on people, and improvement of organizational structures.

TQM/CQI is customer-driven, which means in this theory, students are customers (Seymour, 1991). Students and their employers are examples of external customers, while faculty and staff with whom we interact are internal customers. TQM/CQI demands a respect for all members of the organization with an expectation that all members have something to contribute to make the organization run better (Seymour, 1991). It has a major focus on prevention and problem-solving and that all team members must be brought into the decision making process.

As many colleges began to experiment with TQM/CQI, many stated that these principles had practical applications in the higher education environment (Seymour, 1996). The bulk of the literature available seemed to focus on efforts and case studies of individual colleges attempting to implement these quality initiatives. Seymour (1991) stated that TQM/CQI made most of its inroads early and its contributions were in the administrative area.

However, during these periods of implementation, these quality principles were also applied as colleges and universities attempted to use these standards for program evaluation (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004). Srikanthan and Dalrymple, (2004) stated that TQM/CQI models concentrating on program evaluation focused on two points, the student learning experience and the collaboration surrounding it. This model holds that program quality in a higher education setting should strongly correlate to the quality of the learning experience.

Furthermore, the learning experience requires a dialogue between the learners and the instructors about the nature and scope of their educational experience.

Although TQM/CQI has been enormously popular in the business and industry setting and has made a tremendous impact in the collegiate world, many believe that this theory works well in the manufacturing and production business, but not so well in the higher education setting (Seymour, 1991). Bogue (1998) pointed out that there are many differences between the corporate and collegiate setting regarding customer satisfaction and the student as customer. During this experience at my college, many believed TQM/CQI was appropriate for the admissions and business offices, but inappropriate for classroom setting. However, Seymour (1992) pointed out that these are not the only places where “we degrade, we hassle, and we ignore” (p.115).

Wallin and Ryan (1994) stated that there should be no doubt in a postsecondary institution about the need for greater quality and TQM/CQI is a tool that helps to achieve greater quality. They list these reasons for evaluating institutional quality efforts:

1. Competition. The competitive environment of the education arena demands greater quality and continuing improvement of services. As students/customers are more aware of increased opportunities for postsecondary education, we must meet the needs of our students/customers or some other educational institution will. Providing quality is a basic foundation for survival in today’s education world.
2. Accountability. Increasingly, as less government funds are available for postsecondary education, governing entities are requiring proof of accountability and quality. As less funds are available and more consumers are aware of options available to them, educational institutes are required to supply proof that they are providing quality learning

opportunities. Seymour (1992) may have said it best when he wrote that “The plain fact is that the accountability push has been a light switch that has caused many organizations to illuminate their concern for quality” (p. 6).

3. External customer satisfaction. This item is closely related to competition. We must treat our students with exceptional customer service or because of the ready availability of other educational opportunities, those students will go somewhere else. Wallin and Ryan (1994) state that “the delivery of a particular product or service is enhanced or undermined by the way it is offered or by the individual who delivers it” (p. 12).

Colleges must focus on the proper delivery of services.

4. Internal customer satisfaction. Efforts toward delivering quality help an organization to develop a sense of mission and pride. If organization members sense that efforts are being made toward making work conditions better, then these individuals will become better providers and better customers. Seymour (1992) states:

The logic is . . . that every person in an organization is both a producer and a consumer. In your role as a consumer, wouldn't you like the produce to present you with a perfect product or service? Would that make your job easier—more enjoyable, more rewarding? Now picture a whole series of need-satisfying producer/consumer linkages throughout your organization. That's quality (p. 13).

Wallin and Ryan (1994) stated that this is the reason that quality is important to the community and technical college setting and further stated that “A college can no longer ignore the wants and needs of its external customers and internal customers. The demands of the new world around us require commitment to quality in all that we do” (p. 13).

In 1995, Graham, Lyman, and Row, published an essay, titled *Accountability of Colleges and Universities*. In this national publication, funded in part by the Mellon Foundation and Columbia University, they stated that higher education has plenty of mechanisms built into various processes to ensure accountability. In fact, they believed colleges and universities have too much of the wrong kind of accountability and not enough of the right kind of accountability.

The majority of institutions of higher education in this country hold regional accreditation status, and for many parents and students regional accreditation equals quality. Colleges and universities also use a successful accreditation review to claim status as a quality institution. However, quality is an elusive concept. Astin (1987) went so far to say that higher education has traditionally defined quality in ways that actually hurt us as institutions of higher education. Mayhew, Ford and Hubbard (1990) stated that “While quality as a concept shares certain abstract dimensions whenever it is discussed, it lends itself to so many different perspectives that meaningful dialogue is impossible unless the participants agree on a common approach.” ( p. 25). Furthermore they state that:

First, quality is a receding horizon. There are no static, acceptable norms of performance. Second, in spite of theoretical considerations, if quality is to be improved, it must be defined with enough specificity so that its attributes are at least suggested, if not clearly delineated. Third, quality improvement is inexorably bound up with assessment and feedback. (p. 27)

### Summary

The review of related literature demonstrated that limited research had been conducted regarding accreditation of postsecondary institutions. This was an unexpected discovery considering the important role accreditation has in higher education. Most of the literature

available addressed the historical development of accreditation and the recent debates over the ability of the system to guarantee quality at America's postsecondary institutes.

During the early part of the twentieth century, a system of regional accrediting bodies developed to help protect and assure educational quality in postsecondary education. There is debate in the literature about the ability of these six regional (and other national) accrediting organizations and their ability to guarantee educational quality. The review of literature concluded that quality is not well understood in higher education. Missing from the research literature were studies regarding how various notions of quality emerge from documents produced for accreditation visits. The research was also vague on how quality is understood by the participants in the process, including accrediting organizations. An area of debate in the scholarly literature is the impact of accreditation and improving educational quality. Although controversy exists on this topic, little scholarly work or review has been conducted.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the most common deficiencies among Georgia's technical colleges attempting to gain and/or maintain Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (COC) accreditation. A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that despite its importance in higher education, accreditation has not received much attention in scholarly literature. The researcher reviewed, through a historical qualitative approach, documents containing findings/recommendations of Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) and other Level I institutions from Compliance Certification documents of the Commission on Colleges.

This chapter describes the procedures and methods utilized to conduct this research study. It includes the purpose of the study, the research questions, design of the study, validity and reliability in qualitative studies, data collection, and data analysis.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify deficiencies from Georgia technical colleges and other Level I institutions attempting to gain affirmation or reaffirmation of accreditation. These deficiencies or findings come from Compliance Certification documents that all colleges must now complete in order to receive accreditation or be reaffirmed for accreditation. Colleges must certify compliance in eleven or twelve (depending on status) core requirements, ten comprehensive standards, and eight federal requirements. The purpose of this study was to

identify problem areas so that technical colleges in Georgia beginning and currently in the process of achieving accreditation can focus their efforts on areas that have been identified as being deficient at similar institutions during the past three years.

### Research Questions

These research questions guided this study:

1. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within Georgia's technical colleges?
2. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges?
3. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges, categorized by state?
4. What are the specific Principles of Accreditation Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements cited by the Commission on Colleges as being deficient within all Level I colleges, categorized by size?

### Design of the Study

This study was a qualitative research study using historical documents for the collection of data. As its name implies, historical research involves researching, understanding, and explaining historical or past events (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). This type of research is useful for coming to conclusions concerning causes, effects, or trends of past occurrences that should help to explain current events and anticipate future actions (Gay, 1996). Historical studies are

conducted less frequently than other types of studies, but there are certain types of educational issues (such as grading, or the most frequent findings from COC visits) that can be better understood by researching past events (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

Typically, historical studies seek out data already available (Gay, 1996). There are two main types of historical data, primary and secondary (Merriam, 1998). A small number of researchers categorize preliminary sources as a type of historical data. Preliminary data sources are indexes of primary and secondary sources (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Preliminary sources include bibliographies, bibliographies of biographies, and directories of historical sources (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

Research sources such as firsthand knowledge and original documents are considered primary sources (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). These sources of information were generated by people who witnessed or participated in the events being researched. A goal of historical research is to obtain as much primary source of information as possible (Gay, 1996).

Written documents or records are the most common type of primary source in historical research (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003). These materials take on a variety of forms such as memoirs, legal records, court testimony, institutional files, newspapers and other periodicals. Written documents can be handwritten or typed, published or unpublished.

The majority of qualitative findings come from three types of research strategies: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, (2) direct observation, and (3) written documents. To analyze this further in terms of historical research, there are four main types of primary sources in historical research (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). They are (1) written documents or records, (2) quantitative records, (3) oral records, and (4) relics (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Some primary

source materials can be classified under two different categories depending on how they are used in the research process.

Although it may seem odd that quantitative records are a type of historical research within a qualitative study, it is actually an important source that should not be overlooked. Numerical records can provide historical numerical information such as census reports, budgets, test scores, and school attendance records (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Compilations of numerical data is a valuable source of information for historical researchers.

Another important type of primary source is oral records (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Many historians conduct oral, in-depth interviews of individuals who witnessed or participated in events of significance. Interviews can also have a unique purpose, that is, to learn and gather information not obtainable in any other way (Gay, 1996).

A fourth category of primary sources is called relics (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). This category includes any object whose properties provide information about the past. This can include and physical materials or physical objects found within the study setting.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) stated that in historical research, secondary sources are documents or accounts of information from someone who did not witness an event, but heard about it. The authors of secondary source documents base their accounts on descriptions or records of historical events that were prepared by others. So it stands to reason that most historical research uses secondary sources because the researcher is rarely a direct witness to the events being studied.

Although historical research is a type of qualitative research and may not have many of the control processes of other types of quantitative research, it still involves systematic and objective data collection and analysis (Gay, 1996). As historians often point out, knowledge of

historical events can not only increase understanding of the present, but also facilitate anticipation of future needs (Merriam, 1998). This was the purpose of this research project, to help to understand the most common findings so that community and technical colleges can understand common areas of concern and focus attention on those areas.

The steps involved in a historical research study are essentially the same as for other types of research: definition of a problem, formulation of questions to be answered, collection of data, evaluation of data, and production of findings (Gay, 1996). Historical research is not writing a paper about a past event; its purpose is to help explain or predict. A historical research paper is seeking to expound new knowledge regarding certain data or to clarify, correct, or expand existing data (O'Conner, 2002). A unique aspect of historical studies is that the researcher cannot manipulate or control anything that previously happened (Gay, 1996).

#### Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Historical Research Studies

Patton (2002) noted that all research is concerned with validity and reliability. It is important to be able to trust the results of the educational research. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). Validity and reliability should be approached with careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented.

Gall, Gall, & Borg (2003) defined validity as the degree to which a study accurately reflects the concept the research is attempting to measure. Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that in a qualitative study, the researcher needs to ensure that the interviews were reliably and validly constructed, the content of the documents were properly analyzed, and the conclusions of the research are based in data. Validity can be measured both internally and externally (Gay, 1996).

Internal validity is the care and rigor in which the study was conducted. It looks at the study design, the care taken to conduct measurements, and what was and was not studied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Several methods exist to ensure validity in qualitative studies. Merriam (2002) suggested that a qualitative researcher triangulate data (multiple sources of data or multiple methods of verification of data), perform member checks of the data (have participants review data), and conduct peer review of the data (have a colleague familiar with the research or topic review the data).

External validity is the extent to which the results are transferable or generalizable (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Merriam (2002) stated that this aspect of qualitative research has confused some, but that it should be conceptualized as reader or user generalizability. She stated that in this context, readers determine the extent to which findings can be applied to their situation. Merriam (2002) stated that providing rich and thick descriptions is a major method of ensuring external validity in a qualitative study.

Reliability is the extent to which a study would produce the same results, if repeated (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Merriam (2002) stated that reliability usually deals with the instrumentation of the study, but in qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Merriam (2002) proposed two of the same methods to ensure reliability as she proposed for internal validity, and added a third method exclusively for reliability. She stated that researcher should triangulate and peer review the data and proposed developing an audit trail. The audit trail is dependent upon the researcher keeping thorough data records so that independent researchers can authenticate the findings by reviewing the data, or audit trail, of the researcher (Merriam, 2002).

This research can be determined to be both valid and reliable. The research documents used in this study were obtained directly from the confidential files housed at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools offices. This research was conducted over a period of several days and the findings of each college were carefully double-checked after reviewing each college's file. The results of this research project are transferable as all colleges are judged according to the same criteria and the findings from this study will be of assistance to all Level I colleges accredited by the Commission on Colleges. As a measure to verify the accuracy of the documents on file at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the results from four files of the forty-four participating colleges were independently verified by contacting the accreditation liaison of the four randomly selected colleges. The independent verification matched the results in the files at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A complete listing of all the data collected for independent verification is contained in a spreadsheet that lists all colleges reviewed and the findings for each college.

#### Data Selection

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges organizes colleges and universities by the highest degree offered at that institution (SACS/COC, 2004). Accordingly, member institutions are categorized into six different levels:

1. Level I. Associate Degree as highest degree
2. Level II. Baccalaureate Degree as highest degree
3. Level III. Master's Degree as highest degree
4. Level IV. Master's Degree and Education Specialist Degree as highest degree
5. Level V. Three or fewer Doctoral Degrees as highest degrees

6. Level VI. Four or more Doctoral Degrees as highest degree.

Technical colleges in the state of Georgia seek membership and gain admission status to COC as Level I institutions. According to the Commission on Colleges, 39%, or 311 out of its 794 member institutions are Level I institutions (COC, 2006).

The purpose of this research study was to provide information for Georgia's technical colleges beginning the accreditation process and to those that will soon experience the reaffirmation of accreditation process. Therefore, this study first examined the deficiencies identified by Georgia's technical colleges attempting to gain accreditation, and then as a broader sample, this study reviewed the overall population of Level I institutions within the Commission on Colleges who had undergone reaffirmation of accreditation under the Principles of Accreditation.

For the purposes of this study, only Compliance Certification documents from the years of 2003, 2004, and 2005 were reviewed. According to the Commission on Colleges, forty-five institutions received reaffirmation of accreditation or initial accreditation during those years (SACS/COC, 2006). The Compliance Certification documents from those colleges were the documents targeted for review in this study. These documents are on file at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS/COC) office in Decatur, Georgia.

Unlike the previous Criteria for Accreditation with its more than 400 prescriptive "must" statements, the Principles of Accreditation is divided into three sections that compose the Compliance Certification document. The Core Requirements section has twelve basic qualifications that an institution must meet. The Comprehensive Standards has fifty-three separate requirements that must be addressed. Finally, the Federal Requirements has eight

policies that the college must provide evidence of compliance. It is expected of the seventy-three Principles of Accreditation that some would surface frequently during the research while others may never be cited.

The three broad categories are listed below along with the total number of Principles of Accreditation within each category and the percentage represented by the category.

Table 2

*Number and Percentage of Principles of Accreditation by Category*

<b>Section</b>	<b>Number of Principles</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Core Requirements	12	16%
Comprehensive Standards	53	73%
Federal Requirements	8	11%

Data Collection

Compliance Certification documents are not public information. An individual must have permission from each specific institution to access the documents pertaining to a particular college. A list of colleges meeting the criteria was obtained from the of the COC staff.

Prior to beginning the research, a “Request for Determination of Non-Human Subject Research” form was obtained from the Vice President for Research, Human Subjects Office. Information about the research project was submitted to the Institutional Review Board. Upon review, the Institutional Review Board determined that this study did not meet the criteria for human subject research.

The next step in the research was to obtain the name of the chief executive and the address of the colleges from the SACS web site. Then, permission forms were mailed to each

college in order to receive written permission to review and study the institutions' documents. Forms were mailed to the chief executive officer of each institution as identified by the SACS web site. The executives were asked to sign and return a form granting permission for release of the contents of the institution's visiting committee reports.

The requirement of obtaining permission from each college resulted in less than 100% participation in the study. One college declined to participate. The Compliance Certification documents of the remaining forty-four institutions were analyzed for this study.

After the receipt of all permission forms, the permission forms were transmitted to COC staff to begin preparing the files of the colleges participating in the study. Upon notification that the documents were ready, the researcher traveled to the SACS headquarters in Decatur, Georgia to spend several days reviewing Compliance Certification documents and deficiencies as identified by visiting teams. Not only did the files contain Compliance Certification documents, but they also contained responses from the colleges to correct the deficiencies identified. Upon conclusion of examining the documents, the researcher then returned home to tabulate and compile the data for this study.

### Data Analysis

The results of this data collection have been analyzed using historical qualitative research methods. The results include the total number of findings for the entire survey population of forty-four institutions, but also by state, size, and governance structure.

Results for states are reported for ten of the eleven states represented within the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Only Kentucky did not have a Level I college seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation during the three year period reviewed. The

ten states are listed below with the number of institutions represented and the percentage represented by the state in the study.

Table 3

*Number and Percentages of States Represented*

<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Institutions Represented</b>	<b>Percentage Represented in Study</b>
Alabama	6	14%
Florida	4	9%
Georgia	8	18%
Louisiana	1	2%
Mississippi	1	2%
North Carolina	8	18%
South Carolina	2	5%
Tennessee	2	5%
Texas	9	20%
Virginia	3	7%

In order to measure results by size, the forty-four participating institutions were ranked according to fiscal year 2005 unduplicated enrollment. Four groupings emerged and will be referred to as Smallest, Small, Large, Largest. The enrollment ranges are listed below.

Table 4

*Number of Institutions Represented by Size*

<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Number of Institutions Represented</b>
Smallest	194 – 1,990	12

Small	2,005 - 2,962	11
Large	3,062 – 6,048	12
Largest	8,491 – 24,769	9

### Summary

The purpose of this historical review of qualitative data was to determine the most common findings or deficiencies from Georgia’s technical colleges and other Level I colleges seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. This study also sought to determine if patterns of deficiencies existed in various states, by size, and by governance structure. This research was completed reviewing data from forty-four Level I colleges at the headquarters of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in Decatur, Georgia.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the most common deficiencies among Georgia's technical colleges in attempting to gain and/or maintain Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (COC) accreditation. Data was collected from the Compliance Certification documents of the Level I institutions that received either initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation from the years of 2003, 2004, and 2005. This chapter focuses on the results and findings of the research study. This chapter has been organized into four sections:

1. Most Frequent Deficiencies in Georgia's Technical Colleges
2. Most Frequent Deficiencies in all Level I Colleges
3. Most Frequent Deficiencies Organized by State
4. Most Frequent Deficiencies Organized by Size of Institution

The data in each section is reviewed by the three categories found in the Compliance Certification document, Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements. The Core Requirements section has twelve basic qualifications that an institution must meet. The Comprehensive Standards has fifty-three separate requirements that must be addressed. Finally, the Federal Requirements has eight policies that the college must provide evidence of compliance. The most common findings of deficiency in each of these categories is reviewed in each section.

## Most Frequent Deficiencies in Georgia's Technical Colleges

### *Core Requirements*

A review of the data collected from the eight technical colleges in Georgia found that only one of the twelve Core Requirements was cited as being deficient. Core Requirement 2.12 was cited at two of the eight colleges as being deficient. This Core Requirement reads as follows, "The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p.17).

### *Comprehensive Standards*

A review of the data collected in the Comprehensive Standards found one standard that received more findings of deficiency than any of the others. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 was cited to five of the eight technical colleges reviewed. This means that 62.5% of Georgia's technical colleges received a finding in this area. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 is found in the sub-section titled "Faculty" and reads as follows:

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 in accord with the guidelines listed below. 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 entire faculty (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 24).

The second most common finding of deficiency among Georgia's technical colleges was Comprehensive Standard 3.2.5. While four of the eight technical colleges received a finding in this area, this was not repeated during the overall review. In fact, the four colleges cited in Georgia were the only colleges cited for this deficiency. Comprehensive Standard 3.2.5 reads as follows, "Members of the governing board can be dismissed only for cause and by due process" (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 21).

Evaluation of the college administrators and the chief executive was next most common finding of deficiency among Georgia's technical colleges. Three of the eight colleges were cited for not meeting the requirements of Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10. This Comprehensive Standard reads as follows, "The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis" (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

In Georgia, issues of technical college foundation control and publication of academic policies tied for the fourth most common findings. Two colleges each were cited for Comprehensive Standard 3.2.13:

An institution-related foundation, not controlled by the institution, has a contractual or other formal agreement that (a) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation, and (b) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

Additionally, two colleges were cited for 3.4.5:

The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 23).

#### *Federal Requirements*

No technical college within the state of Georgia was found to be deficient in any of the eight federal requirements.

#### *Summary by Findings*

A summary of all recommendations cited in Georgia appears in Table 5. The findings are listed in order of frequency, beginning with the recommendation that was cited in the most reports.

Table 5

#### *Most Frequently Cited Deficiencies - Georgia*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Deficiency Cited</b>	<b>Number of Institutions Represented</b>
1	Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 - 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 in accord with the guidelines listed below. 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 entire faculty.	5

2	Comprehensive Standard 3.2.5 - Members of the governing board can be dismissed only for cause and by due process.	4
3	Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10 - The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.	3
4 (tie)	Core Requirement 2.12 - The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.	2
4 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.2.13 - An institution-related foundation, not controlled by the institution, has a contractual or other formal agreement that (a) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation, and (b) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission.	2
4 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.4.5 - The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution.	2
5 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1 - The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.	1
5 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 - The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies.	1
5 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1 - The institution provides facilities, services, and other learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.	1
5 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.8.3 - The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences both in library or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of	1

the institution.

- |         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| 5 (tie) | Comprehensive Standard 3.9.3 - The institution provides services supporting its mission with qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs programs. | 1 |
|---------|---|---|

### Most Frequent Deficiencies in all Level I Colleges

#### *Core Requirements*

An examination of the data from all of the colleges participating in the research project found that Core Requirement 2.12, regarding the Quality Enhancement Plan, was the most common deficiency among the colleges reviewed. This particular Core Requirement was cited to 21 of the 44 colleges. This amounts to 47.7% of the colleges reviewed.

Another Core Requirement was cited thirteen times to the other colleges researched. This is a total of 29.5% of the colleges reviewed. Core Requirement 2.11 reads as follows:

The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. The institution provides the following financial statements: (a) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a systemwide or statewide audit) and management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant or an appropriate auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (b) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board; and (c) an audited statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and

plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p.17).

### *Comprehensive Standards*

The Comprehensive Standard cited most often among all of the colleges reviewed was cited to thirty-three of the forty-four colleges reviewed. This means that this finding was cited to 75% of all colleges reviewed. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 is found in the sub-section titled “Faculty” and reads as follows:

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 in accord with the guidelines listed below. 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 entire faculty (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 24).

The second most common finding among all of the colleges participating in this review was Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. This Comprehensive Standard was cited fourteen times to different colleges during the review period. This equals 31.8 % of the colleges in the research study. Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 is found in the sub-section titled “Institutional Effectiveness” and reads as follows:

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

The third most common finding among all of the colleges reviewed dealt with student outcomes. Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 was cited ten times as being deficient. This totals 22.7% of all the colleges reviewed. Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 reads as follows “The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies” (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 24).

In reviewing the data of all the colleges, Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10 and 3.7.2 tied for receiving the fourth most number of deficiencies. Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10 deals with the evaluation of administrators and the chief executive. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.2 reads as follows, “The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status” (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 26).

#### *Federal Requirements*

No college within the overall survey was found to be deficient in any of the eight federal requirements.

#### *Summary by Findings*

A summary of the ten recommendations cited most overall appears in Table 6. The findings are listed in order of frequency, beginning with the recommendation that was cited in the most reports.

Table 6

*Most Frequently Cited Deficiencies – All Level I Colleges Reviewed*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Deficiency Cited</b>	<b>Number of Institutions Represented</b>
1	Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 - 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 in accord with the guidelines listed below. 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 entire faculty.	33
2	Core Requirement 2.12 - The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.	21
3	Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 - The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.	14
4	Core Requirement 2.11 - The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. The institution provides the following financial statements: (a) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a systemwide or statewide audit) and management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant or an appropriate auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (b) an annual budget that is preceded	13

by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board; and (c) an audited statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year.

5	Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 - The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies.	10
6 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.7.2 - The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.	8
6 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10 - The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.	8
8	Comprehensive Standard 3.2.13 - An institution-related foundation, not controlled by the institution, has a contractual or other formal agreement that (a) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation, and (b) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission.	7
9 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1 - The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.	6
9 (tie)	Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3 - The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.	6

#### Most Frequent Deficiencies Organized by State

This section focuses on the results and findings of the research study for the states within the jurisdiction of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and

Schools. Although there are 11 states represented in the Southern Association, only six are reported in this section. Kentucky had no colleges that were reviewed during this time frame, and Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee had so few colleges to be reviewed that representation in this section might jeopardize promised confidentiality. The remaining six states, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia represent 38, or 86%, of the forty four institutions in this study.

### *Alabama*

The total number of recommendations received by Level I institutions in the state of Alabama ranged from 1 to 14. The six institutions received a total of 28 findings of deficiency in some area of a Core Requirement or Comprehensive Standard. The 28 total findings represent 16% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

Of the six institutions researched, five received a finding of deficiency in Core Requirement 2.12, which states “The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p.17).

The second most common finding of deficiency among institutes in Alabama was Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. Four of the six institutions received a finding in this Standard which reads:

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 in accord with the guidelines listed below. 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 all its faculty (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 24).

Core Requirement 2.11 was noted twice to be deficient. This Core Requirement reads as follows:

The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. The institution provides the following financial statements: (a) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a systemwide or statewide audit) and management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant or an appropriate auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (b) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board; and (c) an audited statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p.17).

Institutional effectiveness and institutional processes was also noted twice to be deficient in Alabama colleges. Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 reads as follows:

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

Finally, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1 was found to be deficient in two colleges. This standard deal with educational programs and outcomes and reads as follows, “The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes” (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

### *Florida*

The number of findings of deficiency for Florida range from 1 to 15 with a total of 20 recommendations for the entire state. This indicates that one institution had the majority of findings of deficiency in this research study. The 20 total findings represent 12% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

Faculty credentials was the most common finding of deficiency. Three of the four institutions reviewed in Florida during this period had findings that noted a deficiency in Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1.

Two of the four institutions being reviewed received findings of deficiencies in Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1., regarding institutional effectiveness, and Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1., dealing with educational programs. Another Comprehensive Standard, 3.2.9., was also cited as being deficient in two colleges. This Standard reads as follows, “The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff” (Commission on Colleges, 2001, p. 22).

### *Georgia*

The number of findings of deficiency noted in the state of Georgia ranged from 1 to 5 with a total of 22 recommendations. It is interesting to note that all of the Level I colleges that received a review in Georgia during the years from 2003 to 2005 were public technical colleges. The 22 total findings represent 13% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

Of the eight technical colleges reviewed, two Comprehensive Standards were found to be deficient four times. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 dealing with faculty credentials and Comprehensive Standard 3.2.5 that addresses dismissal of members of the governing board were the most common findings in Georgia. The state of Georgia accounted for all of the findings of deficiency of Comprehensive Standard 3.2.5, as no other state had an institution noted as being deficient in this Standard. The state of Georgia also had three institutions to be found lacking in Comprehensive Standard 3.2.10. This is the Standard that deals with processes to evaluate administrators and its chief executives on an annual basis.

### *Louisiana*

Statistical data from Louisiana will not be included in this section of the study. Only one Level I institution received a reaffirmation of accreditation visit between 2003 and 2005. Since the chief executives of all participating institutions were promised confidentiality of results, reporting of the data for Louisiana would be, in effect, revealing the accreditation report for that one college. However, the results for that one institution are included in the overall results and the results by size.

### *Mississippi*

Statistical data from Mississippi will not be included in this section of the study. Only one Level I institution received a reaffirmation of accreditation visit between 2003 and 2005.

Since the chief executives of all participating institutions were promised confidentiality of results, reporting of the data for Mississippi would be, in effect, revealing the accreditation report for that one college. However, the results for that one institution are included in the overall results and the results by size.

#### *North Carolina*

The number of findings of deficiency received by institutions in North Carolina ranged from 2 to 17 for a total of 60 findings. Although North Carolina did not have the highest number of institutions represented in this study, the 60 findings of deficiency were the most recorded by any state. The 60 total findings represent 35% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

Eight of the eight institutions represented in this survey had a finding of deficiency in the area of faculty credentials, Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. Two Core Requirements tied for the next highest findings, Core Requirement 2.11 dealing with financial resources and Core Requirement 2.12 that addresses the Quality Enhancement Plan. Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 received four findings of non-compliance. This Standard addresses educational programs and learning outcomes.

#### *South Carolina*

Statistical data from South Carolina will not be included in this section of the study. Only two Level I institutions received a reaffirmation of accreditation visit between 2003 and 2005. Since the chief executives of all participating institutions were promised confidentiality of results, reporting of the data for South Carolina would be, in effect, revealing the accreditation report for those two colleges. However, the results for those two institutions are included in the overall results and the results by size.

#### *Tennessee*

Statistical data from Tennessee will not be included in this section of the study. Only two Level I institutions received a reaffirmation of accreditation visit between 2003 and 2005. Since the chief executives of all participating institutions were promised confidentiality of results, reporting of the data for Tennessee would be, in effect, revealing the accreditation report for those two colleges. However, the results for those two institutions are included in the overall results and the results by size.

### *Texas*

The number of recommendations for Texas range from 1 to 7 with a total of 33 recommendations for the 9 institutions reviewed. The nine institutions represented made up the largest representation by any state. The 33 total findings represent 19% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

The most frequently cited deficiency for the state of Texas was Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1, which deals with faculty credentials. Seven of nine institutions reviewed had findings regarding faculty credentials. The second most common deficiency was in the area of institutional effectiveness. Five of nine institutions were cited regarding Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. The Quality Enhancement Plan was the third most common deficiency. Four of nine institutions were found to need additional work to gain compliance with Comprehensive Standard 2.12.

### *Virginia*

Virginia had the smallest number of colleges to receive a review during the years from 2003 to 2005 and be included in this study. Only three Level I colleges within the state received a review during these three years. The number of deficiencies noted at these colleges ranged

from 1 to 4 with a total of 9 received. The nine total findings represent 5% of all the findings of deficiency in this study.

The most common deficiency among Virginia colleges was in the area of faculty credentials. All three colleges received a finding of deficiency for Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. No other Core Requirement or Comprehensive Standard received multiple findings in Virginia.

#### Most Frequent Deficiencies Organized by Size of Institution

The forty four institutions that provided the basis for this research study have been divided into four categories according to size of enrollment. The categories have been labeled Smallest, Small, Large, and Largest. These categories should only be used as a reference to other institutions in this research project.

##### *Smallest*

The smallest institution in this survey had a full time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 194. For the purposes of this research project, the upper end of the FTE for this group was an institution with an FTE of 1,990. This FTE grouping encompasses 12 institutions.

The colleges within this grouping had a total of 58 findings of deficiency. The most common finding of deficiency was in the area of faculty credentials, Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. Ten of the twelve institutions in this category received a finding in this area. Two standards tied for the second most finding in this grouping. Six colleges received findings of non-compliance on Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 regarding institutional effectiveness, and Core Requirement 2.12, the Quality Enhancement Plan.

##### *Small*

The institutions within this category had FTE's that ranged from 2,005 to 2,962. This category represented 11 of the forty four institutions in this study. The colleges represented in this category had a total of 57 findings of deficiency.

Faculty credentials were the most common finding of deficiency with 7 of the 11 institutions receiving a finding of non-compliance in this area. The next most common area of deficiency was in the area of institutional effectiveness. Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 was cited 6 times as being deficient. The Quality Enhancement Plan was the next most common area cited. Core Requirement 2.12 was cited five times in this category.

### *Large*

This category was represented by institutions with FTE's from 3,062 to 6,048. This represented twelve institutions in this research project. Colleges within this category had a total of 45 findings of deficiency.

Two items were tied for the most findings of non-compliance. Seven colleges were found to need additional work on Core Requirement 2.12, Quality Enhancement Plan, and Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1, faculty credentials. The second most common finding within this category was Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1. This standard deals with educational programs and outcomes and was cited at four of the twelve colleges in this category.

### *Largest*

This category is composed of the largest institutions participating in this research project. The institutions in this grouping had FTE's that ranged from 8,491 to 24,769. This represented 9 of the forty four colleges in this study.

Eight of the nine institutions received findings of non-compliance regarding faculty credentials, Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. Four other areas, two Core Requirements and two

Comprehensive Standards, were cited three times each. The two Core Requirements cited were 2.11 and 2.12, dealing with financial resources and the Quality Enhancement Plan. The two Comprehensive Standards, 3.2.10, evaluation of administrators and the chief executive, and 3.7.3, which deals with professional development of faculty as teachers.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the most common deficiencies among Georgia's technical colleges in attempting to gain and/or maintain Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (COC) accreditation. A study collecting data on the most common deficiencies from COC reviews is beneficial in that data collected and findings shared can provide the basis for future decisions by other Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education technical colleges. It was also determined that a review of the most common findings among all Level I colleges attempting to achieve Commission on College initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation would be useful. With the current and projected list of technical colleges attempting to achieve COC accreditation, the need to research and offer assistance in the most common problem areas in technical colleges in Georgia and all Level I colleges would provide a framework to concentrate resources and development.

#### Findings

##### *Georgia's Technical Colleges*

All eight colleges receiving initial or reaffirmation of accreditation during the research time frame of 2003, 2004, and 2005 were Georgia public technical colleges. The design of this study was to be of assistance to Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) system colleges. Since all colleges researched during this project are DTAE colleges, the findings are of particular significance to the remaining technical colleges seeking accreditation and reaffirmation of accreditation.

The most commonly cited deficiency was in the area of faculty credentials, Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1. All five colleges that received a finding in this area had at least general education instructor cited that was teaching a course such as English, math, or psychology. Specific occupational or technical instructor credentials were cited only once.

### *Overall Findings*

The specific criteria that merits special attention in this section as it is the most commonly cited deficiency is the section that deals with faculty credentials. Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 was cited at 33 out of the 44 institutions in this study. This recommendation was received at 75% of the institutions receiving a review during the years of 2003 through 2005. This standard was also cited as the most common deficiency in all but one state, Alabama, and in every ranking by enrollment size.

### *Findings by State*

The previous chapter focused on the differences in results by state of Level I colleges that received a review during the years of 2003, 2004, and 2005. Generally, the same deficiencies were noted for each state, faculty credentials, institutional effectiveness, and Quality Enhancement Plan. There are 11 states represented in the Southern Association, however, only 6 were reported in this section. Kentucky had no colleges that were reviewed during this time frame, and Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee had so few colleges to be reviewed that representation might have jeopardized promised confidentiality. Although the remaining states comprised the majority of the research data, caution should be placed in reviewing these results. The number of colleges reviewed in each state may be too small an indicator to serve as a performance indicator for all colleges in a particular state.

### *Findings by Enrollment Size*

The colleges receiving reviews were divided into four groupings based on enrollment size. Interestingly, the two smallest groups, accounted for more than half of all the findings in the survey, or 58% of the findings. The two largest groupings, accounted for the remaining 42% of the findings. The individual percentages by group decreases as the group increases in size. The Smallest enrollment group accounted for 31% of the findings, the Small group accounted for 28%, the Large group accounted for 23%, and the Largest group accounted for 18%.

### Conclusions

The results of this research indicate that several Principles of Accreditation were cited as being deficient upon review of Compliance Certification documents. However, one deficiency seemed to run throughout the research, faculty credentials. For Georgia's technical colleges, the results of this research indicate that faculty credentials, board policy, and annual presidential job performance reviews should be of primary concern when beginning the Commission on College application and reaffirmation of accreditation process. Overall, colleges in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools should concentrate on faculty credentials and planning and evaluation through the Quality Enhancement Plan and institutional effectiveness during the Commission on Colleges review process.

The purpose of this study was to provide assistance to Georgia's technical colleges by examining Compliance Certification documents pertaining to the Commission on Colleges application and reaffirmation of accreditation process. Through a qualitative design, the researcher examined historical documents and presented data concerning reviews that occurred in 2003, 2004, and 2005. The findings of this study suggested that certain Principles of Accreditation do receive more notations of deficiency than others. It is hoped that this

information will be of value to administrators and institutional research and effectiveness personnel throughout the technical college system of Georgia.

### Recommendations

This study has attempted to provide useful information for technical colleges in Georgia attempting to begin the application or reaffirmation of accreditation process. The accreditation process focuses on quality, so all aspects of the Principles of Accreditation should be addressed thoroughly. However, by concentrating on the most common findings of deficiency, technical colleges may be able to focus scarce resources in areas that will enhance their application or reaffirmation process.

#### *Recommendations for further research*

During the course of this research project, several issues were discovered and revealed that present the opportunity for further data collection and research:

A finding of this research seems to show some correlation between the size of an institution and the number of findings received. There seems to be an inverse relationship. It appears the larger an institution, the smaller the number of recommendations. Researchers should examine this correlation to determine if in fact a larger college that can devote more resources to this process will receive less findings of deficiency.

A specific study should be conducted to measure the degree of autonomy among Level I institutions within individual states. Some states have a less-centralized system of governance and control, while others have a strong, centralized system that sets policies and exercises financial control. Research should be conducted to determine if the type of system present in a particular state has any affect on the number of findings received.

The Commission on Colleges ranks institutions into six categories. The mission of a community or technical college is obviously different from that of a baccalaureate or master's degree granting institution. However, research should be conducted to discover the most common findings of deficiencies among Level II through Level VI colleges. This would provide valuable information to the Commission on Colleges as well as those colleges beginning the application or reaffirmation of accreditation process.

*Recommendations for practice*

Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 requires that the institution employ competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. An institution must also demonstrate that all faculty have the credentials to teach what they are teaching. The criteria go on to specify that when determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution give primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline in accordance with several guidelines. An institution is also to consider faculty 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, an institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty.

Several reasons may exist that this standard was cited so frequently. An institution is required to have all faculty credentials and files available during a review, so the documents are readily accessible. Additionally, the Commission on Colleges has created a new documentation form that requires all faculty members, along with education and experiences, and classes taught, to be listed and available. So, easier review of faculty credentials may be adding to increased

scrutiny. Also, Level I colleges traditionally have large numbers of part-time, adjunct instructors and if any of these instructors are found deficient, then the entire institution receives a finding. Occasionally, by the nature of the courses taught and by remote location, Level I colleges have a difficult time finding a qualified instructor. However, as long as this remains an area of focus by the Commission on Colleges, all Level I colleges must concentrate more on finding faculty with appropriate credentials.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was introduced in 2001 with the first QEP due to be reviewed in 2003. The QEP seems to be meeting with mixed results as 48% of the institutions reviewed received some type finding of deficiency in this requirement. The Commission on Colleges has taken note of this and has created a summer symposium devoted to the QEP and assisting colleges with its development and implementation. All colleges beginning the reaffirmation of accreditation should probably take advantage of this training opportunity.

Georgia's technical colleges were similar to other Level I colleges in receiving findings of deficiency in faculty credentials and the Quality Enhancement Plan. However it was the only state to receive any findings in area of due process dismissal for governing board members, and it accounted for a majority of the findings in the area of evaluation of the chief executive officer. This lack of a policy for due process for dismissal of a governing board member may indicate a lack of policy review prior to DTAE technical colleges beginning the regional accreditation process. In the situation of both the due process and the evaluation of the chief executive officer, it would appear that governing office of Georgia's technical colleges needs to implement certain policies and procedures to prevent its technical colleges from receiving findings of deficiency.

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