A SINGLE CASE STUDY OF THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN COMPONENT OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS’ ACCREDITATION PROCESS: IDENTIFYING INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

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Abstract

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges ratification of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* signified a major shift in the process its member institutions undertake to become accredited. Core Requirement Twelve, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), is a significant component of the revised accreditation process and an innovative catalyst for improving overall institutional quality and effectiveness. The QEP requires campuses to create a plan that focuses on significantly enhancing some aspect of student learning the campus considers important to the educational experience of its students. The general purpose of this study was to identify internal and external factors that influenced the QEP process of a public Level I Institution reaffirmed under the Commission on Colleges’ revised standards. Research specifically focused on ascertaining and describing the factors from an institutional perspective. A qualitative methodology involving a single public two-year campus reaffirmed under the revised standards was used to address the line of inquiry employed in this study. Data for the study was obtained through in-depth interviews, document review, and an online questionnaire. The general approach to qualitative data analysis was predominantly guided by the Constant Comparison Method of data examination, which consists of recording, collecting, and comparing data of a social phenomenon across emerging categories. Concepts, themes, and patterns across the total range of interviews were classified, compared, and combined to present an institutional perspective regarding the factors perceived to have influenced the college’s QEP. Data obtained from transcripts were corroborated using documents collected from the research setting and questionnaire responses. The major finding of the study was that the following 10 factors were perceived to have influenced the QEP process of a public Level I Institution: (a) project or initiative; (b) internal motivation; (c) external research; (d)
internal research; (e) support from accrediting agency; (f) focus for the QEP; (g) founding steering committee; (h) process strategies; (i) commitment of college leadership; and (j) reaffirmation review. Based on these findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and research are offered.