GeorgiaInstitute **of Tech**nology

Office of Academic Effectiveness

Creating the Next in Academic Effectiveness

Introduction

Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) is in the business of creating the next — the next idea, the next technology, and the next legion of visionary leaders. Bound together by passion and skill, spurred by our imaginations, and rolling up our sleeves to get it done, our faculty, researchers, and students focus on solving the grand challenges of our time. In April 2018, the Commission on Creating the Next in Education (CNE) published its final report, "Deliberate Innovation, Lifetime Education." The Commission was convened by Provost Rafael L. Bras and co-chaired by Richard DeMillo, Executive Director of Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities, and Bonnie Ferri, Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Faculty Development. Using the year 2040 as a long-term vantage point, the Commission outlined recommendations on alternative educational models that "reduce costs, improve the effectiveness of current methodologies and pedagogies, and increase opportunities and accessibility to serve the needs of the next generation and beyond." (provost.gatech.edu/commission-creating-next-education)

Accreditation and assessment for continuous improvement are essential to pursuit of the goals outlined by the Commission. For this reason, the Provost created the Faculty Council on Accreditation (FCA) and charged the FCA with creating a framework for Georgia Tech to ensure best practices in accreditation and assessment.

Georgia Tech is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (See Appendix A for information about accreditation.) Across the Institute, academic programs are accredited by several different agencies, including ABET, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Int'l (AACSB), the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) and more. While program self-studies are prepared at the unit level, we can learn from all the Georgia Tech accreditations about how best to advance an Institute-wide culture of continuous improvement. Accordingly, in pursuing its charge, the FCA promotes our shared understanding of multiple

accreditation standards and our interpretation and application of them to advance a culture of continuous improvement at Georgia Tech.

The FCA defines excellence in academic effectiveness as continuous improvement related to student learning outcomes, educational programs, and academic support. The FCA creates a culture of awareness and sharing of resources related to accreditation and assessment activities to promote synergies across programs and the Institute in pursuit of excellence in academic effectiveness. These activities are interconnected across standards and accreditors. When done consistently, good practices are good habits, which will be used across accreditations whenever they are due. We can learn from each other. We can share examples. We can learn from shared experiences. We can use common information for multiple purposes in accreditation.

By enhancing transparency among ourselves and across the campus community, the FCA can both empower and streamline institutional commitment. While various accreditors include agency-specific nuances in their standards, the FCA's review of Georgia Tech accreditations, both programmatic and institutional, identified principles of accreditation that are common to all. (See Appendix B for all Georgia Tech accreditations.)

Principles Common to All Accrediting Agencies

There are many common elements across accreditations represented at Georgia Tech. While agency timelines and standards may differ, at the core of accreditation there are a number of important and common principles:

- Continuous Improvement
- Best Practices in Education and Operations
- Accurate Representation of Status
- Mission, Legal Status, Governance, Geography
- Openness & Transparency in Education and Operations
- Consistency in Modes of Delivery
- Academic and Student Support Services
- Adequacy of Physical Resources

- Compliant Financial Management

- Adequate and Accessible Libraries

- Appropriate Hiring and Evaluation Practices

- Faculty Adequacy and Competency

- Assessment of Student Learning

The anchors of this list (Continuous Improvement and Assessment of Student Learning) provide the strongest tie and the most obvious opportunity for the FCA to find and promote synergies among ourselves and among leadership, and colleagues across campus. The habits and continuous improvement efforts we engage in today contribute to a larger accreditation activity or event later. Ultimately, these habits and continuous improvement efforts connect across agency standards and across time. They allow us to tell the story of improving student learning and the student experience. While the Institute must provide evidence of good educational practice during accreditation preparation, accreditors ultimately measure an institution's performance by discerning how well and how genuinely it uses its improvement processes for the good of faculty and students consistently over time. Georgia Tech's habits of continuous improvement today not only improve experiences and environments for our students now and in the future, these habits display the culture of improvement expected by all of our accreditors. This is what makes the whole of a culture of improvement greater than the sum of its parts and more than a set of check boxes.

In the CNE report, the culture of a deliberately innovative organization was explored, including the idea of a systems approach that "…would allow the examination of innovation processes in interacting groups of people and organizations." (Commission on Creating the Next, 2018). Of the necessary steps outlined in the report, one in particular speaks directly to the need for the FCA: Bridging Organizational Silos. The report defines organizational silos as "policies, procedures, or cultural limits that inhibit people of different groups from free interaction." (Commission on Creating the Next, 2018). The bridging of programmatic and regional accreditation principles, ideas, and resources at Georgia Tech, historically performed in silos, is an idea whose time has come. Continuous improvement consists of synergistic activities that the FCA can explore and promote. The set of common principles of accreditation were immediately obvious to the FCA in their first meeting. Yet, that is not a consistently shared perception across campus. The FCA can change that. The culture does not shift because the FCA serves in a task-master role. Instead, the FCA serves in a proactive role to share common accreditation
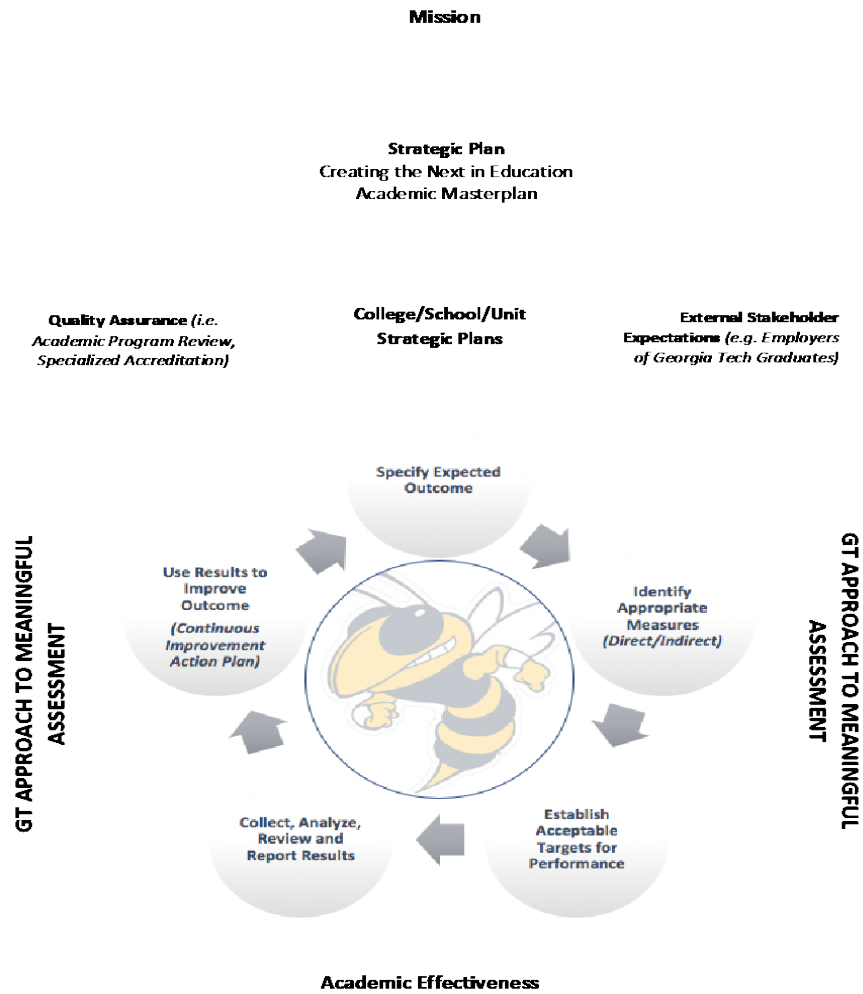
principles and experiences, contributing to the emerging campus-wide shift to a culture of continuous improvement.

Georgia Tech's Approach to Academic Effectiveness

Georgia Tech strives for a culture of improvement and sustained excellence across academic programs that are led by faculty. Figure 1 shows an integrative approach to effectiveness stemming from the Institute's mission and strategic plan. With the onboarding of Georgia Tech's president, Dr. Ángel Cabrera, strategic planning is at top of mind for the Institute. The strategic plans of colleges, schools, and units flow from the Institute and provide interconnection and direction.

Student learning is our top priority and at the heart of academic programs at the Institute. Therefore, the Georgia Tech approach to meaningful assessment fronts student learning outcomes, considers student performance, and uses that information to inform improvements in student learning and the student experience. According to Stitt-Bergh, Wehlburg, Rhodes, & Jankowski (2019), "This assessment-for-learning approach goes beyond individual students and courses and includes programs. Faculty know that the learning they most value, such as critical and creative thinking, inquiry and analysis, and intercultural knowledge, needs to occur throughout the curriculum in order for students to carry that learning with them" (p. 45). As the authors further describe, institutional and program-level learning assessment must capitalize on what happens at the course-level through information from faculty and their judgment, along with other relevant sources and data. Through this pairing, the Institute can describe what students have learned and where improvements can be made, which is the ultimate purpose of academic effectiveness (represented in the middle of Figure 1).

Academic Effectiveness Framework for Meaningful Outcomes Assessment

Mission

Strategic Plan
Creating the Next in Education
Academic Masterplan

Quality Assurance *(i.e. Academic Program Review, Specialized Accreditation)*

College/School/Unit Strategic Plans

External Stakeholder Expectations *(e.g. Employers of Georgia Tech Graduates)*

GT APPROACH TO MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

Specify Expected Outcome

Use Results to Improve Outcome *(Continuous Improvement Action Plan)*

Identify Appropriate Measures *(Direct/Indirect)*

Collect, Analyze, Review and Report Results

Establish Acceptable Targets for Performance

GT APPROACH TO MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

Academic Effectiveness

GT Office of Academic Effectiveness

Next Steps

In order for the FCA's proactive role to promote an emerging campus-wide shift to a culture of continuous improvement, a "Call to Action" for the group will encourage good practice in assessment and accreditation. The FCA can elevate and share good examples of assessment done well, examples that come from within the Institute and beyond the Institute, ensuring that assessment resources are available. The FCA can highlight the "nuts and bolts" of good assessment, including building resources that work in our environment. Reasonable integration is top of mind for the FCA, such as careful

consideration of how assessment information can be used in curricular development and revision at varying levels of curriculum committees.

Specifically, the FCA will consider issues that affect the quality of student learning. Examples can be brought to the attention of the FCA, followed by ideation for possible solutions, engagement and outreach to related constituencies on campus, and pursuit of continuous improvement.   The following topics are examples:

- interdisciplinary structure to support the academic administration of multidisciplinary programs
- resources for academic assessment
- academic program review
- administrative assessment
- effectiveness activities across the Institute
- Strategic Plan reporting

In addition, the FCA can encourage consideration of how elements of learning analytics can be integrated into assessment information, especially in light of the purchase of Canvas as the Institute's learning management system. Further, integration of solid learning outcomes and 21st Century Skills in courses and programs as the driver for what we want students to know and do is at the top of mind. Finally, easily acquired self-serve options for student information, trend data, and survey data—options already available at the Institute—encourage the Institute to embrace transparency and use the information for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The FCA fosters a team approach to assessment and accreditation that cuts across organizational silos and promotes Institute-wide synergies. (Commission on Creating the Next, 2018). The FCA is a crucial force for promoting the team-orientation necessary for maintaining accreditation standards consistently across time so that the Institute is "visit-ready" for an accreditor at any time. It is the habits and practices of today, grounded in easily identified common principles across accreditors that can make a difference in how the Institute approaches accreditation and the ongoing pursuit of excellence in academic effectiveness.

References

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Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (2018) *FAQs.* Retrieved from https://sacscoc.org/about-sacscoc/faqs/

Stitt-Bergh, M., Wehlburg, C. M., Rhodes, T., & Jankowski, N. (March 2019). Assessment for student learning and the public good. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 51:2, 43-46.

Appendix A

About Accreditation

Accrediting agencies are responsible for determining educational quality. As the SACSCOC website explains:

> Regional accrediting bodies conduct comprehensive reviews of institutions of higher education and operate primarily in a specific geographical area. The accreditation granted encompasses the entire institution including reported branch campuses, other instructional sites, online programs, and distance learning modalities. Regional accrediting bodies typically accredit a wide range of institutions offering associate, baccalaureate, masters and/or doctoral degrees. There are seven regional accrediting associations in the United States comprising eight commissions that grant institution-wide accreditation. Specialized or programmatic accrediting bodies conduct focused reviews of a single educational program. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2018).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE):

> Accreditation status from regional accrediting agencies is granted to an entire institution, including all of its programs, for purposes of participating in Title IV Federal Student Aid programs, but such status does not guarantee the quality of individual programs. Programmatic accreditation can demonstrate that a specific department meets established standards for a certain field of study. Many prospective employers require graduation from a program accredited by a certain programmatic organization and licensure requirements for some fields in certain states require recognized programmatic accreditation. (Hegji, 2017).

The DOE describes the practice of accreditation as "a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs" and lists the following as some of the purposes of accreditation:

- Assess the quality of academic programs at institutions of higher education;
- Create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions;
- Involve the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning; and
- Establish criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation (Hegji, 2017).

Appendix B

College	School	Program	Accrediting Agency
			Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
		All Degree Programs	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International)
		Bachelor of Science in Computer Science	ABET
School of Interactive Computing and the School of Literature, Media, and Communication		Bachelor of Science in Computational Media	ABET
School of Architecture		Master of Architecture (2 year Track)	National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB)
School of Architecture		Master of Architecture (3 year Track)	National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB)
School of City and Regional Planning		Master of City and Regional Planning	Planning Accreditation Board (PAB)
School of Industrial Design		Bachelor of Science in Industrial Design	National Association of Schools in Art and Design (NASAD)

College	School	Program	Accrediting Agency
School of Industrial Design		Master of Industrial Design	National Association of Schools in Art and Design (NASAD)
School of Aerospace Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering	ABET
School of Biomedical Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering	ABET
School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Chemical and Biomedical Engineering	ABET
School of Civil and Environmental Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering	ABET
School of Electrical and Computer Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering	ABET
School of Electrical and Computer Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering	ABET
School of Civil and Environmental Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering	ABET
School of Industrial and Systems Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering	ABET
School of Materials Science and Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Materials Science and Engineering	ABET
School of Mechanical Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering	ABET
School of Mechanical Engineering		Bachelor of Science in Nuclear and Radiological Engineering	ABET

College	School	Program	Accrediting Agency
School of Mechanical Engineering		Master of Science in Medical Physics	Commission on Accreditation of Medical Physics Educational Programs (CAMPEP)
School of Mechanical Engineering		PhD with a Major in Nuclear and Radiological Engineering	Commission on Accreditation of Medical Physics Educational Programs (CAMPEP)
Counseling Center			International Association of Counseling Services (IACS)
Counseling Center		Pre-Doctoral Internship Training Program in Psychology for Doctoral Students in Counseling and Clinical Psychology Programs	American Psychological Association (APA)
GT Language Institute		Intensive English Program	Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA)