

3.4.7

Educational Programs: All:Consortial relationships/contractual agreements

The institution ensures the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortia relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the *Principles*, and periodically evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the mission of the institution. (See the Commission policy "Collaborative Academic Arrangements.")

Judgment

Compliance Partial Compliance Non-Compliance Not Applicable

Narrative

Tennessee Technological University (TTU) currently has two consortial/contractual academic agreements with out-of-state institutions. The first of these involves an association between the Department of Biology and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) [1]. The second involves a dual degree between the College of Business and FH Aachen University in Germany [2]. TTU also participates in two consortia within the Tennessee higher education system: the Regents Online Campus Collaborative [3], and the Tennessee Consortium for International Studies (TnCIS) [4].

Marine Biology-Associated Courses at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory

TTU entered in a formal agreement with the GCRL in 1997 [5]. Students enrolled in the Marine Biology option within the Biology concentration in the Department of Biology are required to take a minimum of two specialty courses at a marine station, typically during a single summer semester. These courses are selected by the student in consultation with the marine biology faculty advisor [6]. Most students take courses at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL), located in Ocean Springs, MS, with which TTU is an affiliated member institution [7]. The GCRL is a unit within the College of Science and Technology at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), a SACSCOC-accredited university [8].

All courses taken by TTU students are offered during the summer as part of two separate month-long sessions, with the course offerings varying from year to year based on the specialties of the visiting teaching staff (as indicated in the course descriptions and syllabi for Summer 2014 [9]). All courses are approved through the USM curriculum committees and are accredited through SACSCOC. GCRL courses are then accepted at TTU via the normal course transfer process. As part of this process, course information (primarily taken from the course syllabus) is evaluated by the Marine Biology option advisor and, if necessary, the Biology Department chairperson to ensure that these courses meet with TTU Biology Department standards for course quality. When courses are deemed acceptable as transfer credits, they are treated as substitutions for upper-level biology elective courses.

The agreement between TTU and GCRL is renewed on an annual basis. The GCRL is visited by the Marine Biology faculty advisor once or twice each year, and the consortium agreement is reviewed annually by the departmental chairperson in consultation with the Marine Biology faculty advisor. In addition, the agreement between the Biology Department and the GCRL is reviewed by the entire Biology faculty periodically, typically every five years in association with the departmental external review process (most recently in 2010-11; the next review will be 2015-16).

College of Business Dual Degree Program

The College of Business at TTU has partnered with FH Aachen University in Germany to provide a program in which students take classes for two years at TTU, spend their junior year taking business classes at Aachen University, and then return to TTU for their final year of course work. Upon

completion of this process, students earn degrees from both institutions; a similar, reciprocal arrangement is possible for business students studying at Aachen University, per the TTU-Aachen agreement [10]. The Business Studies program at FH Aachen University has been accredited by the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) board [11] [12]. Courses taken by TTU students at FH Aachen are accepted via the typical international university course transfer process [13]. The TTU-Aachen program has also been approved by SACSCOC [14]. This international partnership helps TTU meet its stated mission as an institution that “prepares students for success in a global economy.”

Regents Online Campus Collaborative/Regents Online Degree Programs

The Regents Online Campus Collaborative (ROCC) was started in 2001 as the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP), with all Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) colleges, universities, and technology centers joining in a collaborative effort to offer a full range of graduate and undergraduate courses, degrees, certificates, and diplomas online [3]. Each of the TBR institutions participating in the ROCC program and staffing courses is accredited by SACSCOC. TTU faculty participating in ROCC offer courses available for credit to any student registered at one of the TBR institutions, and TTU students may take ROCC courses for credit toward a TTU degree.

To enable each participating institution to affirm the credentials of faculty teaching ROCC courses, a new faculty credentials database (Maestro) was implemented by the TBR in the fall of 2014. The Maestro database stores faculty credentials, such as the faculty credential review form and the transcript of the terminal degree and/or the faculty CV, and provides institutions with a tool to review and approve faculty qualifications for all ROCC courses. During the fall 2014 semester, TTU went through an extensive review of ROCC faculty credentials. All department chairs at TTU were granted access to the TBR Maestro system and reviewed ROCC faculty credentials in their discipline areas to affirm that ROCC faculty were properly qualified to teach their assigned courses. TTU department chairs can thus challenge or even reject the qualifications of ROCC faculty members hired at other TBR campuses if their credentials are insufficiently documented or do not meet TTU standards as guided by SACSCOC.

To resolve the confusion resulting from the continued use of both ROCC and RODP in references to this TBR online collaborative, starting fall 2015 it will be renamed “TN eCampus,” as described in the June 2015 system newsletter [15].

Tennessee Consortium for International Studies

TTU is one of 19 colleges and universities in the state that participate in the TnCIS [4]. This consortium supports a central goal of higher education throughout the state of Tennessee, international education and cultural understanding, as well as TTU’s mission as an institution that “promotes personal growth and a healthy society” and “prepares students for success in a global economy.”

TnCIS is housed at Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC), a TBR institution in Knoxville, Tennessee. TTU annually reviews prospective TnCIS course offerings to determine which of its own courses (or elective credit) each proposed course should count for, as indicated in the attached list of TnCIS courses for 2014 that were evaluated for TTU-specific course credit [16].

Conclusion

TTU recognizes that its participation in academic consortia carries the responsibility of ensuring the high quality of programs and courses offered by other participating institutions, and assesses these agreements against applicable principles to ensure adherence to standards and its mission. TTU is therefore in compliance with Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7.

Sources

-  [01] University of Southern Mississippi
-  [02] Aachen University
-  [03] RODP Website
-  [04] Tennessee Consortium for International Students
-  [05] GCRL Affiliate Contract_TN Tech_1997
-  [06] Biology Concentration
-  [07] Gulf Coast Research
-  [08] University of Southern Mississippi Accreditation
-  [09] University of Southern Mississippi Summer Field Program Courses
-  [10] TTU Aachen Agreement
-  [11] Aachen International Programs
-  [12] FIBBA
-  [13] Study Abroad Handbook
-  [14] SACSCOC Approval_1_9_2014
-  [15] TBR ROCC Newsletter 06_25_2015
-  [16] TTU TnCIS_2014 Course Evaluation