Georgia State University will be re-accredited.

In order to ensure quality, Georgia State University is constantly seeking re-accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS, one of six regional educational accrediting associations in the United States, will be on campus March 18-20 to evaluate how Georgia State is meeting core standards.

Georgia State undergoes this examination every 10 years. But, new this time, SACS is requiring universities to adopt a Quality Enhancement Plan, transforming an area that directly impacts student learning.

For its plan, Georgia State developed Critical Thinking Through Writing (CTW), an initiative approved by the University Senate in April 2007. The goal of the plan is to help undergraduates develop critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills expressed through writing, which could apply to real-world settings.

By fall 2009, all Georgia State students entering bachelor degree programs will be required to pass two CTW courses in their major in order to graduate. A handful of Georgia State instructors are currently piloting Critical Thinking Through Writing. For example, in instructor Ray Bunch's class, students are required to analyze and write explanations about actual legal situations that may arise in their future roles as managers.

"In the real world, you have to be able to see the big picture, think on your feet and justify your answers," Bunch said. "With these real-world exercises, students learn to see three to four steps down the road."

The re-accreditation process is critical to the success of the university. Without accreditation, a university is ineligible for state and federal funding, and its academic degrees are less valued and the school's overall reputation is diminished, said Mary Finn, associate provost for institutional effectiveness.

"Accreditation gives us the opportunity to look at ourselves, assess where we are and figure out what we need to do to make the learning environment for students even better," Finn said.

In preparation for the visit, Georgia State officials have been assessing the university's functions, procedures, plans and mission to ensure compliance with SACS standards. "We are in good shape going in," Finn said.

Why do we need an emergency management plan?

It is a brand-new position and brand-new program that the university is developing. We are establishing a framework by which we can mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergency events - both natural and man-made disasters. It could be anything from inclement weather to terrorism to chemical spills, or something that happens off campus that impacts us.

What's coming in the future?

My office will soon be asking faculty, students and staff for their e-mail addresses and phone numbers so we will be able to contact them in case of an emergency situation, either universitywide or location specific. Another component will be on the Georgia State Web site. If there is an emergency an alert message will be posted online with a map showing the location of the emergency and the details of the situation. We're also drafting a policy that develops a framework and allows each college or department to appoint an emergency coordinator. And, we will be conducting new employee and student orientation of the university's emergency management plan.

Why is it important to be prepared?

One of the things that garnered a lot of attention was the unfortunate event that occurred at Virginia Tech. I think that event culminated in the decision to say, “Look, we need to develop a process and have more functional programs, so we can manage emergencies across the full spectrum.”

The Board of Regents has announced the appointment of the committee that will conduct a national search for a new Georgia State University president. Susan Herbst, University System of Georgia executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer, made the announcement Feb. 5.

Members of the Board of Regents, representatives from Georgia State and community leaders make up the 20-member committee. Over the coming months, they will look for a replacement for Georgia State Presidents Carl V. Patton, who announced in November his plans to retire at the end of June.

The committee will begin by developing a position description, placing announcements in appropriate national media and conducting interviews with the candidates. Parker Executive Search, a firm based in Atlanta, will assist the committee in the search and recruitment process.

The committee will forward the credentials of five unraked candidates to Chancellor Erroll B. Davis Jr. who will make a recommendation to the full board.
With so many products, how do you know if you should invest the time (you need to use these products daily if they are to confer any health benefits) and money (these products are more expensive than non-fortified foods)?

I asked Mary Ellen Sanders, a scientist and business consultant who is past president of the International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics, how consumers can choose products that best meet their needs.

“Consumers who are healthy might want to incorporate probiotic foods into their diets for possible immune and digestive health benefits,” she said. “For consumers who have specific health concerns, I encourage them to call the manufacturers and visit their Web sites. Ask if the probiotic it is selling has been tested for what you are interested in treating and if it is in a dose that has shown to impart the benefit.”

Many of these products promise improved digestive health, and some even offer a “gut check” on their Web sites. But how do you really know if you need to improve digestion? If you eat adequate fruits and vegetables and get plenty of dietary fiber, you might not need to improve digestion.

Sanders encourages consumers to look for additional benefits when choosing a probiotic.

“We know many seniors and women lack calcium in their diets, so looking at the nutritional profile of the food and choosing one that provides essential nutrients is an important consideration,” she said.

With so many products, how do you know if you should invest the time (you need to use these products daily if they are to confer any health benefits) and money (these products are more expensive than non-fortified foods)?
university briefs

Groundbreaking for new student housing

Georgia State is breaking ground on two new housing projects this month that will bring the university’s goal of having 20 percent of students living on campus by 2015 closer to reality.

A groundbreaking ceremony will be at 2:30 p.m. Feb. 28 at the corner of Edgewood and Piedmont avenues.

The housing projects are expected to be complete by fall 2009. One complex will be a freshmen hall able to accommodate 325 to 350 students in two-bedroom units with a shared bathroom. There won’t be any kitchens in the units because a traditional dining hall will be located on the first floor of the hall. Also, across from the University Lofts, three-story town houses for Greek houses will be built.

Representatives from the Greek organizations, the Freshman Learning Communities, the Division of Student Affairs as well as members of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents, Central Atlanta Progress and the Atlanta City Council are expected to attend.

Employee performance evaluations due in March

It’s that time of year when managers formally evaluate and provide feedback to their employees.

The Department of Human Resources is offering a course for managers on how to conduct performance evaluations from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Feb. 21 in the basement conference room in One Park Place. Also, training on the use of this form can be scheduled by calling the Office of Employee Relations at (404) 413-3287.

In addition, the Department of Human Resources will host classes on performance management with tips for managers on supervising employees from 9 a.m. to noon April 2, 3 and 9 in the same location.

The mandatory performance evaluation form is online at www2.gsu.edu/~wwhre/forms/index.html.

Performance evaluations are due no later than 5:15 p.m. March 31 and should be submitted to Tineke Battle, human resources coordinator. Please hand deliver the forms to the Department of Human Resources on the third floor of One Park Place, or send by interoffice mail to P.O. Box 3982.

For more information, contact Human Resources at (404) 413-3308.

Nominations sought for 2008 Sparks Awards

The Georgia State University Alumni Association is seeking nominations for the 2008 Sparks Awards.

The Sparks Awards are designed to recognize Georgia State’s unsung heroes: faculty, staff and students who exemplify a willingness to “go the extra mile” with good humor and perseverance. The Sparks Awards were first presented by the Alumni Association in 1985 and were named after George McIntosh Sparks, the university’s president from 1928 to 1957.

Pick up a nomination form at 133 Alumni Hall or online at www.gastatealumni.net. Attach a one- to two-page typed statement explaining why the nominee should receive a Sparks Award, including specific examples of how the nominee has gone beyond the duties and responsibilities of his or her job description.

All nominations must be associated with Georgia State for at least two years. Students should be juniors, seniors or graduate students enrolled in the spring semester. Individuals who hold titles of dean or vice president, including associates and assistants, are not eligible for the awards.

The deadline for submission is 5 p.m. March 3. The awards will be presented at a reception at 2 p.m. April 22 in the Student Center Speakers Auditorium.

For more information, contact the Alumni Association at (404) 413-2190.

Staff Council elections 2008

With all the coverage of the U.S. presidential race, don’t forget about an important election going on here at Georgia State: Staff Council elections. Have a voice in the university’s policies and procedures, and vote for your representative.

All Georgia State staff members are eligible to vote in the election, which began Feb. 18 and runs through Feb. 29.

A few Staff Council districts will not have representatives running for office because representatives from those districts were newly elected in 2007 and will continue their service through February 2009.

Staff Council is the staff representation in the University Senate, which also has student and faculty representation. The Staff Council’s mission is to foster effective communication within the university community.

For more information, contact Randall Alberts, Staff Council elections chair, at (404) 413-4303.
Payroll to change frequency in July

Think of it as an opportunity to review your spending habits and learn the craft of budgeting. Starting in July, instead of receiving a paycheck twice a month, Georgia State exempt employees will be paid monthly.

“We understand that this may be a challenge for some employees, but to become more efficient and customer-focused, we need to do this,” said Beth Jones, associate vice president of Georgia State’s Division of Finance and Administration.

Exempt employees will be paid on the last business day of the month, beginning July 31. Health care deductions and other contributions will be doubled and withheld on a monthly basis.

Non-exempt employees, who fill out time sheets, will also be affected. On July 18, their pay frequency will go from bi-monthly to bi-weekly for a total of 26 pay dates per year, instead of 24. Deductions for hourly employees will continue to be taken twice per month. Every employee’s annual pay will remain the same — it will just be divided differently. Tax brackets will be unchanged as well.

Deductions for flexible spending accounts will remain bi-monthly for all employees until July, when the deductions will occur monthly for exempt employees and bi-weekly for non-exempt employees. Financial advisers suggest employees use the next six months to prepare for the payroll change. Attend a budgeting class offered by the Georgia State University Federal Credit Union. Talk to billing companies about moving payment dates to the end of the month. Set up a savings account and automatically transfer a portion of the paycheck into it.

Exempt employees especially are urged to save for the transition because they will be paid June 30 and not collect a paycheck again until July 31.

Each employee will receive a letter at home notifying them about the payroll modification along with an example of their monthly pay check. The letters were mailed Feb. 15.

With the change, the payroll department will have more time to answer calls and e-mails from employees with questions or problems, Jones said. Georgia State’s pay cycle also will be consistent with other institutions in the University System of Georgia.

For questions or problems, please contact the payroll office at (404) 413-3500 or payroll@gsu.edu.

Effective dates for non-exempt employees:

- July 18
- Aug. 1, 15, 29
- Sept. 12, 26
- Oct. 10, 24
- Nov. 7, 21
- Dec. 5, 19

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Source: Finance and Administration.