

## **Graceland Accreditation Visit**

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The Higher Learning Commission will visit Lamoni campus, February 19-20, to determine Graceland's "ongoing suitability" for accreditation. All member institutions of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools must be reviewed at least every 10 years. Graceland's last review was in 1996.

Accreditation is a quality check, "like a check mark on milk," says Katie Clauson of Graceland Research/Accreditation. "It shows the college is concerned with quality and measures up to certain standards." Without accreditation, financial aid for students would be jeopardized, the University would be unable to qualify for many grants, and credits may not transfer to other institutions.

A team of six "consultant-evaluators" from the Commission will meet with staff, faculty, students and other community members during their visit. Members of the team may stop to talk to anyone about his or her experiences at Graceland. The commission will hold an open forum Tuesday afternoon (February 20) specifically for students. Be sure to attend if there is something you want them to know. "If you talk to a visitor, enjoy your chat. Your honest answers are the best answers!" says a one-page summary of the students role in the Graceland review process.

The visiting team members each work full-time for colleges of similar size and characteristics to Graceland University. The team holds the dual responsibility of making sure the school upholds the standard expected by the commission, and acting as consultants to help improve Graceland. Wednesday morning, the team will provide an aural report of their findings. A full written report will come within the next two months.

In reality, the campus visit is only a small part of the review process required by the Commission. According to their web site, each organization engages in a "self-study process for approximately two years and prepare a report of its findings in accordance with Commission expectations."

A committee of 12 staff, faculty, and student gathered assessment data, carried out surveys, and held focus groups for the past two years. This information is compiled in a 140-page report, divided into chapters to address each of the five criteria measured by the Commission. The report and contains detailed data and many interesting facts. Did you know Graceland has more international students than any other Iowa private school, according to a 2005 study?

The report identifies both the strengths and challenges of the institution. "Diversity of the student body is strong," states the report but, "Graceland does not have an ethnically diverse faculty or staff [approx. 96% Caucasian, non-Hispanic]."

Clauson identified communication between administration and the general student body as another challenge. At the same time student participation in 46 standing committees and student government organizations was rated highly.

Online programs through Graceland offer many advantages to students who would otherwise find it difficult to attend classes, but online students found less support and missed much of the "Graceland experience" enjoyed by on-campus students.

Of course, the recent success of SIFE and the men's soccer team receives due note.

Michelle Keenan is the student representative for the "Self Study Task Force."