



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

ACCREDITATION RECORDS RETENTION, MAINTENANCE, AND DESTRUCTION POLICY FOR SACSCOC

Policy Statement

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) will retain, maintain, and destroy Accreditation Records as required by law, applicable regulations and SACSCOC policy.

Definitions

“Accreditation Records” means those documents created by SACSCOC and by its member institutions that are in the possession of SACSCOC that relate to an institution’s application, evaluation, and decision for initial accreditation, for reaffirmation of accreditation, for substantive change, and include all committee reviews, final reports, appeals, and decisions. Final versions of Accreditation Records shall include minutes and transcripts of C&R committee meetings, as well as minutes of Executive Council and Board of Trustees meetings concerning actions on accreditation of institutions. Final versions of Accreditation Records include all Official Correspondence, Fifth-Year Interim Report, Fifth-Year Follow-Up Reports, Third-Party Comments and Unsolicited Information. Accreditation Records do not include Business Records, Corporate Records, Litigation Records, or Regulatory Records. Electronic Records to which SACSCOC has access but does not have authority to copy or retain shall not be considered Accreditation Records. SACSCOC will retain all decision letters regarding pre-accreditation, accreditation, and substantive changes. All final versions of other Accreditation Records shall be retained for two decennial cycles and then destroyed.

“Business Records” means those Documents that concern SACSCOC operations, including annual reports, budgets, audits, tax filings, financial records, insurance policies, intellectual property and licenses, and contracts with outside vendors, files and records maintained concerning the employment and performance of officers and SACSCOC employees, including annual contracts or appointment letters, compensation and benefit information, evaluations, reprimands, resignations, terminations, and severance information.

“Commission” means the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, Inc., its trustees, officers, employees, evaluators, and volunteers.

“Corporate Records” means those Documents necessary to maintain the corporate form of SACSCOC including articles of incorporation, bylaws, policies, standing rules, minutes of the Board of Trustees to the extent that they do not involve action on accreditation of institutions, and minutes of the College Delegate Assembly.

“Document” means any form of record retention, including paper copies and Electronic Records.

“Electronic Devices” means any type of hardware on which Electronic Records may be created, retained, or maintained, including but not limited to computers, tablets, phones, or wearable devices capable of creating, retaining, or maintaining Electronic Records.

“Electronic Records” means information created, manipulated, communicated, stored, and best utilized in digital form, requiring the use of computer hardware and software, including but not limited to documents, forms, reports, files,

spreadsheets, audio recordings, video recordings, and informational materials or records conveyed electronically via electronic communication methods, including, but not limited to, email, instant messaging, social networking (i.e., Twitter, blogs, etc.), text messages, and voice mail messages.

“Fifth-Year Follow-Up Report” means a report submitted five years prior to an institution’s reaffirmation review, a Fifth-Year Follow-Up Report, also called “an Additional Report to the Fifth-Year Interim Report,” addresses accreditation issues identified for verification of continued compliance during a prior meeting of the Committee on Compliance and Reports.

“Fifth-Year Interim Report” means a report submitted five years prior to an institution’s reaffirmation review, a Fifth-Year Interim Report includes (1) a modified Compliance Certification that addresses only those federal expectations that are integrated in the various requirements and standards of *The Principles of Accreditation*; (2) an Impact Report on the QEP; (3) an [Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews](#), and (4) a separate Interim Off-Campus Instructional Site (OCIS) Report (where applicable). . (See “Fifth-Year Interim Review” in the [Institutional Resources](#) section at www.sacscoc.org). An institution’s “Fifth-Year Interim Report” is not considered a final version of an Accreditation Record.

“Litigation Records” means all pleadings, discovery material, orders, appeals, decisions, and opinions concerning any lawsuits brought by or against SACSCOC.

“Official Correspondence” includes all correspondence signed by the SACSCOC President and addressed to applicant, candidate, or member institutions informing them of formal Commission actions and other correspondence deemed critical to the accreditation functions of SACSCOC. SACSCOC will retain all decision letters regarding pre-accreditation, accreditation, and substantive changes.

“Regulatory Records” means all those Documents concerning the relationship of SACSCOC with the United States Department of Education, including applications and petitions for recognition or renewal, correspondence with NACIQI, correspondence with the Secretary of Education or any Undersecretary involving recognition or renewal, and any complaints against SACSCOC.

“Third-Party Comments,” in accordance with SACSCOC policy “Third-Party Comment by the Public” available at www.sacscoc.org, means information provided by the public in determining whether an institution’s performance at the time of formal committee evaluation for candidacy, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation meets all requirements at the time of the relevant committee’s review, SACSCOC invites the public to submit third-party comments. The public is defined as individuals external to the college or university, excluding students. Therefore, this term will not apply to comments forwarded to SACSCOC by the current administration, faculty, and staff.

“Unsolicited Information” means significant accreditation-related information revealed about a candidate or member institution (1) during off-site or on-site committee reviews, (2) between periods of scheduled review, and/or (3) during a meeting on the record with the Committees on Compliance and Reports constitutes unsolicited information that may become the basis for a request for further documentation of compliance with a SACSCOC standard or policy. (Further information can be found in SACSCOC policy [Unsolicited Information](#) available at www.sacscoc.org.)

Applicability

This policy applies only to Accreditation Records. Other SACSCOC records, including Business Records, Corporate Records, Litigation Records, and Regulatory Records shall be retained, maintained, and destroyed in accordance with policy specifically applicable to those records.

This policy applies to Accreditation Records wherever and however they are retained and maintained, whether they are maintained as hard copy files, as Electronic Records, on Electronic Devices owned or supplied by SACSCOC, or on the Electronic Devices of those otherwise subject to this policy.

This policy applies to SACSCOC, its trustees, officers, employees, evaluators, and volunteers, for as long as accreditation records are retained or maintained by them. It shall be the responsibility of the Director of Legal and

Governmental Affairs and Commission Support to disseminate this policy to all to whom it applies and to provide instruction, interpretation, and support in its implementation.

This policy does not seek to provide obligations that may conflict with Federal law or regulations, State Sunshine laws, Open Records, or other document retention laws, and shall be construed wherever possible consistent with such laws; should an apparent conflict arise between this policy and Federal or State law, in all instances such law shall prevail.

Procedures

SACSCOC will retain all decision letters regarding pre-accreditation, accreditation, and substantive changes. All final versions of other Accreditation Records that reside at the SACSCOC office or on its Electronic Devices or on the Electronic Devices of SACSCOC officers and employees shall be maintained for at least the last two (2) full ten-year accreditation cycles, and of applying institutions for the institutions' eligibility process and candidacy review status. All paper copies of Accreditation Records converted to Electronic Records shall be destroyed. It shall be the responsibility of the Vice President assigned to the member institution to implement this policy within three months of the reaffirmation of accreditation.

All final versions of Accreditation Records that reside at the institutions of or on the Electronic Devices of SACSCOC trustees, evaluators, and volunteers shall be maintained in their original form until their term on the SACSCOC Board concludes or until the assignment on which they are working concludes. At the conclusion of the term or the assignment all such Accreditation Records shall be destroyed. It shall be the responsibility of the Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs and Commission Support to assist the trustees in implementing this policy. It shall be the responsibility of Vice President assigned to the member institution to which the evaluator or volunteer is assigned to assist them in implementing this policy.

Drafts of Accreditation Records and notes associated with such drafts shall be retained until a final version of the document has been created and maintained. No drafts of Accreditation Records or notes associated with such drafts shall be retained after a final version of the document has been created and maintained. Drafts and notes shall be destroyed upon the creation of the final version of the document.

Accreditation Records do not include Electronic Records without any administrative, legal, fiscal or archival retention requirements and are deleted as soon as the Documents or messages have served their purpose, including but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, face book notifications, telephone message notifications, information-only copies, extracts of documents transmitted for reference or convenience, transmittal memoranda, reservations and confirmations, or copies of announcements, bulletins or other general information.

SACSCOC shall have no obligation to acquire, retain, or maintain documents on behalf of member institutions other than Accreditation Records. Any undertaking to acquire, retain, or maintain documents on behalf of a member institution, other than Accreditation Records, shall be pursuant to a separate agreement and shall not be subject to this policy. Electronic Records to which SACSCOC has access but does not have authority to copy or retain shall not be considered Accreditation Records.

Document History

*Approved by Board of Trustees: June 2018
(Replaced "Records Maintenance Policy of the Commission on Colleges")
Edited, Board of Trustees; September 2019
Revised, SACSCOC Board of Trustees, December 2019
Revised: Executive Council, March 2022
Revised: Executive Council, March 2023*