



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
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REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION AND SUBSEQUENT REPORTS

Policy Statement

All institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) are required to undergo a review for reaffirmation of accreditation every ten years. After being granted initial accreditation, new member institutions will be reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation after five years, then every ten years thereafter. The Commission's review of institutions between decennial reaffirmation reviews in accordance with policies governing fifth-year interim reviews, special committee visits, and substantive change visits normally will not alter the specified date for the decennial reaffirmation review. (See policy statements "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions," "Special Committee Procedures and Team Report," and "The Fifth-Year Interim Report.")

The Commission reaffirms the accreditation of an institution as a totality. This accreditation extends beyond the parent campus to include all centers, branches, campuses, or other sites at which postsecondary degree or non-degree work is offered as well as all work offered through distance learning and correspondence education. The institution must include the review of all its operations in its Compliance Certification and the Commission will review them during the institution's reaffirmation.

The reaffirmation review will be conducted in accordance with procedures outlined in pertinent Commission documents including handbooks and other policies. (See, for example, the *Principles of Accreditation* and the *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation*.) The process will include compiling and submitting a Compliance Certification that documents compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, and submitting a Quality Enhancement Plan for review by evaluation committees.

Some of the standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* have been designated as Core Requirements [**CR**]. Core Requirements are basic, broad-based, foundational requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited with SACSCOC. They establish a threshold of development required of an institution seeking initial or continued accreditation and reflect the basic expectations of candidate and member institutions. Compliance with the Core Requirements is not sufficient to warrant accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Accredited institutions must also demonstrate compliance with the other standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* and with SACSCOC policies. If an institution fails to document compliance with a Core Requirement at the time of reaffirmation – or at the time of any Board review – the SACSCOC Board of Trustees will place the institution on sanction or take adverse action (see SACSCOC policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership").

During the reaffirmation of accreditation process and in all other relationships with the Commission and with their other constituencies, member institutions are expected to maintain integrity, to abide by the *Principles of Accreditation* and all Commission policies and procedures, to provide the Commission complete and accurate information about institutional operations, to be candid and thorough in their own self-evaluations, to accept an honest and forthright peer assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses, and to cooperate fully with the Commission during all aspects of the process of evaluation in an atmosphere of openness that enables peer evaluators to perform their duties with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Review of Distance Learning and Correspondence Education during the Reaffirmation Process

Institutions will include the review of their distance learning and correspondence education programs in the Compliance Certification that will be reviewed by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will validate the content of the Compliance Certification and the pertinent findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. In its review, the On-Site Committee will determine whether the institution has adequate support services and personnel to operate distance learning and correspondence education programs effectively. (See also the Commission's policies, "Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions," "Distance Learning and Correspondence Education," and Standard 10.6 of the *Principles of Accreditation*.)

Review of Off-Campus Instructional Sites and Branch Campuses during the Reaffirmation Process

Federal regulations require visits to institutional off-campus instructional sites and to branch campuses as a part of the institution's decennial review.

Off-campus instructional sites. The Commission staff member will appoint a committee(s) to visit a representative sample of sites at which 50 percent or more credits for an educational program are offered (taking into account such factors as geographic dispersion and number of students and programs at each site). For each site, the visiting committee will usually be composed of two members of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The review of these visits will be completed either before or during the visit of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee to the main campus.

The purpose of the visit to the off-campus instructional site(s) is to determine whether or not the institution has adequate personnel, facilities, and resources to operate the off-campus site(s). The visiting committee, therefore, will interview relevant faculty and staff at the site(s) and focus particular attention on the following areas: student access to full-time faculty, student achievement and learning, adequate facilities, the appropriateness of other support activities such as library/learning resources and student services *vis-à-vis* the programs offered at the site(s), and any other pertinent compliance issues emerging from the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee report. The institution would have described and addressed its instructional sites and campuses in its Compliance Certification which would have been reviewed by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee before the site visits. (See "Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews.")

Branch Campuses. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will review all branch campuses of the institution. A branch campus is defined as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is

- permanent in nature
- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization **and**
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority

The visiting committee will usually be composed of two members of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The review of these sites will be completed either before or during the visit of the On-Site Committee to the main campus.

The purpose of the visit to branch campuses is to determine whether or not the institution complies with the *Principles of Accreditation* in areas of curriculum and instruction, faculty, administration, institutional effectiveness and student achievement, academic support and learning resources, student services, and facilities and finances. The visiting committee, therefore, will interview relevant faculty and staff at the branch campus. The visiting committee will ensure that the institution has demonstrated sufficiently the comparability of student learning outcomes with those for the same or similar programs on the main campus. The institution would have included and addressed its branch campuses in its Compliance Certification which would have been reviewed by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee before the on-site review of the branch campus.

The Committee Review. If the visiting committee discovers noncompliance with any pertinent standard(s) in the *Principles of Accreditation*, an appropriate narrative and Recommendation will be drafted and submitted to the full On-Site Reaffirmation Committee for consideration and possible inclusion in the Reaffirmation Committee Report. In addition, an introductory paragraph describing the review of the off-campus site(s) and branch campuses any differences from the main campus noted by the visiting committee will be included in the Reaffirmation Committee Report.

Institutional Reports Submitted after Reaffirmation

Each member institution is expected to submit a formal response to the report of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee that demonstrates corrective action to the recommendations made by the Committee. If the institution's response reveals continued noncompliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees will request submission of monitoring reports until compliance is demonstrated. The maximum period for submitting monitoring reports is two years. The institution is subject to sanctions for noncompliance during the monitoring period and potentially to loss of accreditation at any time for noncompliance, particularly if compliance is not demonstrated during the two-year monitoring period. (See policy statement "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership.")

Each member institution also is expected to submit a Fifth-Year Interim Report four years before its next reaffirmation review reporting on continued compliance with select Commission standards and on the effects of the implementation of its Quality Enhancement Plan on student learning. (See Commission policies "Reports Submitted for Committee or Commission Review" and "The Fifth-Year Interim Review.") The Commission will notify institutions regarding the schedule for completion of this report.

Delay or Change of Review Dates

Member institutions may not depart from the regular decennial or Fifth-Year Interim review schedule except under extraordinary circumstances and then only by formal request to and approval by the President of SACSCOC. Normally, change in institutional executive leadership will not constitute adequate reason for delaying or rescheduling the review. The President of SACSCOC and the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees retain the authority to delay or reschedule an institution's reaffirmation review for reasons deriving from particular circumstances either at the institution or within the Commission, including but not necessarily limited to balancing the workload within the Commission and its staff or other unusual circumstances. If an institution is on Probation at the time of its scheduled review for reaffirmation of accreditation, the President of SACSCOC may act to defer action on reaffirmation pending resolution of the institution's probationary status. In the same way, if an institution is on Sanction at the time of its scheduled Fifth-year Interim review, the President of SACSCOC may act to defer the submission of the institution's Fifth-Year Interim Report pending resolution of the institution's status.

Separate Accreditation for Units of Member Institutions

All extended units related to the parent campus through corporate or administrative control must be evaluated during reviews for institutions seeking candidacy, initial membership, or reaffirmation of accreditation. If an extended unit is sufficiently autonomous, it or the parent institution may request separate accreditation, or if the Commission determines that an extended unit is autonomous to the extent that control over that unit by the parent or its board is significantly impaired, the Commission may direct the extended unit to seek separate accreditation. (See policy statement "Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution.")

Review of Institutional Units in a System

If an institution is part of a system or corporate structure, a description of the system's operation must be submitted as part of the Compliance Certification for the decennial review. The description should be designed to help members of the peer review committees understand the mission, governance, and operating procedures of the system and the individual institution's role within that system.

Exception to Core Requirement 3.1.b

Core Requirement 3.1.b of the *Principles of Accreditation* mandates that a member institution “offers all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees” or provide an alternative approach to meeting this requirement. The Commission must approve any alternative approach. Each institution in this category must request the exception and submit supporting documentation at the time the degree program is approved. (See policy statement “Core Requirement 3.1.b: Documenting an Alternative Approach.”)

Unreported Substantive Changes Discovered or Reported during Reaffirmation

If an institution fails to report a substantive change that requires prior approval or prior notification, and that unreported substantive change is discovered during the off-site or the on-site review, the committee will take the following actions:

If discovered during the off-site review. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee will mark Standard 14.2 out of compliance. The institution will be able to address this in its Focused Report and before the on-site review.

If discovered during the on-site review. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will mark Standard 14.2 out of compliance and write a recommendation. The institution will address the recommendation in its response to the Commission.

For a full explanation, see Commission policy statement “Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions.”

Document History

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