



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

## **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. SACSCOC'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 Policy and Procedures](#), [Special Committee Procedures and Team Report](#), and [Fifth-Year Interim Report](#).)

SACSCOC reaffirms the accreditation of an institution as a totality. This accreditation extends beyond the main 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 education and correspondence courses. The institution must include the review of all its operations in its Compliance Certification, and SACSCOC will review them during the institution's reaffirmation.

The reaffirmation review will be conducted in accordance with procedures outlined in pertinent SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC and with their other constituencies, member institutions are expected to maintain integrity, to abide by the *Principles*

*of Accreditation* and all SACSCOC policies and procedures, to provide SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC 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 Education and Correspondence Courses during the Reaffirmation Process**

Institutions will include an analysis of their distance education programs and correspondence courses 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.

A narrative describing the review of the institution's distance education and/or correspondence courses will be included in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee. If the visiting reviewers discover noncompliance with any pertinent standard(s) in the *Principles of Accreditation*, an appropriate narrative and formal Recommendation will be drafted and submitted to the full On-Site Reaffirmation Committee for consideration and possible inclusion in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee.

### **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 SACSCOC staff member – in consultation with the committee's chair – will assign reviewers to visit a representative sample of sites approved to offer 50 percent or more of the credits for an educational program (taking into account such factors as geographic dispersion and number of students and programs at each site). For each site, the visiting team will usually be composed of two members of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. These review visits will be conducted either before or during the visit of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee to the main campus.

Institutions that operate international off-campus instructional sites approved to offer 50 percent or more of the credits for an educational program will be expected to host a visit to a sampling of such sites, as well. Members of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will conduct a visit to at least one of the institution's international sites. The Committee may choose to visit more than one of the institution's international sites, taking such factors as the number of sites, their geographic location, and the educational programs offered at those sites. In almost every instance, reviewers who travel to visit such sites in person will do so prior to arriving on the institution's main campus for the Committee's visit. When a virtual site visit is warranted, Committee members may be asked to conduct their review prior to arriving on campus. (See also SACSCOC [\*Guidelines for International Travel and Committee Visits To Member Institutions.\*](#))

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 SACSCOC 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 team 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 campus(es) 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.** The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee’s review will focus on whether the institution has adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and support services at each site; sufficient fiscal and administrative capacity to operate its existing sites; clear academic control and regular evaluation of its sites; and personnel to operate distance education and correspondence education programs effectively. In addition, the On-Site Committee will consider whether the institution appears to have any issues that would raise questions about its ability to expand off-campus instructional sites in the future. (See also the SACSCOC policies, [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#), [Distance and Correspondence Education](#), and Standard 10.6 of the *Principles of Accreditation*.)

A narrative describing the review of the off-campus site(s) and branch campuses will be included in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee. If the visiting reviewers discover noncompliance with any pertinent standard(s) in the *Principles of Accreditation*, an appropriate narrative and formal Recommendation will be drafted and submitted to the full On-Site Reaffirmation Committee for consideration and possible inclusion in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee.

### **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. Information about monitoring periods and possible sanctions is found in the SACSCOC policy [Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership](#). (See also SACSCOC policy [Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly](#).)

Each member institution also is expected to submit a Fifth-Year Interim Report approximately 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 SACSCOC policies [Reports Submitted for SACSCOC Review](#) and [Fifth-Year Interim Report](#).) SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC 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 main 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 accredited institution may request separate accreditation, or if SACSCOC determines that an extended unit is autonomous to the extent that control over that unit by the main campus or its board is significantly impaired, SACSCOC may direct the extended unit to seek separate accreditation. (See SACSCOC policy [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 SACSCOC policy [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 Reaffirmation Committee's review.

If discovered during the on-site review. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will find Standard 14.2 out of compliance and write a narrative and a formal Recommendation. The institution will address the Recommendation in its response to SACSCOC.

For a complete explanation, see SACSCOC policy [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures.](#)

#### **Document History**

*Adopted: Commission on Colleges, June 2003*

*Revised: Commission on Colleges, June 2008*

*Revised and Edited: January 2012*

*Revised: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2013*

*Edited March 2014*

*Revised and Edited: June 2018, September 2020*