

## UPDATE ON ACCREDITATION STATUS OF BENNETT COLLEGE

**Posted: March 22, 2021**

On Saturday, March 20, 2021, the president and legal counsel of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) were informed by Bennett College that it was voluntarily withdrawing its membership from the association, effective immediately. The institution was scheduled for an Appeals Hearing on Monday, March 22, 2021; however, this action rendered that hearing moot. Bennett College was removed from membership of SACSCOC, effective Saturday, March 20, 2021.

Previously, the SACSCOC leadership and Bennett College were notified on July 24, 2020, that the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia granted SACSCOC Summary Judgment on its claim that there was no disparate treatment of the institution based on race; the Court granted Bennett College partial summary judgment on its common law due process claims and directed that the matter be remanded to the SACSCOC Appeals Committee for application of the proper standard of review. Both sides agreed to remand this matter to a new SACSCOC Appeals Committee to ensure that the Appeals Committee applied the correct standard for review. The Appeals Committee will reconvene in mid-November 2020.

In February 2019, a SACSCOC Appeals Committee of the College Delegate Assembly affirmed the December 9, 2018, decision of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to terminate the accreditation of Bennett College. The Appeals Committee found the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' decision to be reasonable, not arbitrary, and based on the standards cited. "Specifically, the Appeals Committee found the Board's decision reflected a reasonable application of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, which clearly included the use of appropriate professional judgment of evaluators representing SACSCOC in the assessment of compliance with the following standard of the *Principles of Accreditation: Core Requirement 13.1 (Financial resources)*."

Also, the Appeals Committee examined additional financial information provided by the institution which was submitted in accord with the “Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly” policy that allows an institution removed from accreditation solely on the basis of finances to produce new, verifiable financial information made available since the adverse action was taken and that is material to the reason for the adverse action. The Appeals Committee found that Bennett College had “failed to show that the institution possesses resources demonstrating a stable financial base to support the mission and scope of programs and services.” Consequently, the Committee affirmed the action taken by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to remove the institution from accreditation effective as of the date of the appeal’s decision.

On February 22, 2019, SACSCOC was formally notified that it was named as a defendant in a lawsuit filed by Bennett College. SACSCOC agreed to a Consent Order Granting Preliminary Injunction that reinstated Bennett College as a member of SACSCOC on Probation, pending further Order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges is the entity responsible for accrediting degree-granting institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and other international sites approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees that award associate, baccalaureate, master’s, or doctoral degrees. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees is the representative body of the 791-member College Delegate Assembly and is charged with carrying out the accreditation process. To gain or maintain accreditation, an institution must comply with SACSCOC policies and with all standards contained in the *Principles of Accreditation*.

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