




MEMORANDUM

TO: SACSCOC Membership 
FROM: Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President
DATE: January 14, 2025
SUBJECT: Update from the December 2024 SACSCOC Annual Meeting/Board Meeting

Happy New Year! I hope you had a restful and healthy holiday and that the spring semester is a productive one. I am writing to you today to share information from the 2024 SACSCOC Annual Meeting and the SACSCOC Board of Trustees meeting that were held this past December, as well as some other informational tidbits. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

BUDGET

SACSCOC had a 'clean' audit once again—17 straight years! Thanks to Lisa Robinson and her staff for a job well done. We ended the fiscal year's operational budget in the red due primarily to health care costs; however, because of revenue in our investment account, we ended with a fund balance of \$1,186,547 leaving us in the black. Our investment account holdings as of October 31, 2024, were \$10,465,218 even after money was withdrawn to cover the cost of recruiting a new CEO.

LEGAL ISSUES

Pat McKee, SACSCOC legal counsel, reported that we currently had no active litigation; however, one issue that has arisen is how often an institution that is dropped from membership and unsuccessfully goes through the appeal and arbitration processes can go through that same cycle. The issue arose when the Arbitration Panel remanded St. Augustine University's case back to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review in December. After conferring with the US Department of Education, it was determined that if an institution is permitted to submit additional information to the Board, then it would be allowed to go through the appeals and arbitration processes again. The Appeals and Arbitration Policies will be updated to reflect that position.

A question was raised by one of our Public members regarding the rationale for the length of time a public member can serve on the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Our Standing Rules say that both public members and international members may only serve one 3-year term. Mr. McKee and SACSCOC staff

will revisit the Standing Rules and make a recommendation to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees regarding this matter.

SMALL COLLEGE INITIATIVE

The 2025 Small College Initiative will focus on the SACSCOC Standards related to Institutional Finance. The meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2025. Save-the-Date Information pertaining to the meeting will be sent to institutions in the near future.

POLICIES

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees reviewed the following new or revised policies and guidelines. A summary document outlining the policy changes can be found [here](#).

- [Interpretation of Standard 12.6 \(Student debt and financial literacy\)](#) (*implementation delayed*)
- [Accelerated Process for Institutions Accredited by an Institutional Accreditor Recognized by the United States Department of Education](#)
- [Artificial Intelligence in Accreditation Guideline](#) (NEW)
- [Change in Membership](#) (NEW)
- [Differentiated Review Process](#)
- [Integrity and Institutional Obligations to SACSCOC](#)
- Joint and Dual Academic Awards (DISCONTINUED)
- [Reduced Credit Undergraduate Credential Guideline](#) (NEW) (*tabled until March 2025 for further development*).
- [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#) (See summary of changes [here](#))

SACSCOC STAFF REPORTS

2023-2028 Strategic Plan

The framework for the new SACSCOC Strategic Plan for 2023-2028 was reviewed by the Executive Council. The plan's theme is "Committed to Quality Since 1895." Six strategic goals of focus include: promoting quality and achievement, leveraging technology, expanding training, communicating successes, supporting pathways to membership and expanding staff support. Much of the current year will be spent developing a marketing plan for the Commission that will focus on the value of accreditation in an effort to retain current members as well as recruit new ones.

Report on Applicant and Candidate Institutions

One institution was authorized to receive an Accreditation Candidacy Committee visit and one institution was denied such a visit. Applications from the University of the Bahamas, and two colleges within the Interdenominational Theological Center, which has withdrawn its membership from SACSCOC, have also been received.

Substantive Change

Requests continue to increase with a total of 4,400 substantive change cases completed as of November 7, 2024. This represents a 28% year-over-year increase in volume. The good news is that the average length of time to review the changes has decreased due to the implementation of efficiencies due to electronic submissions.

THREE-YEAR BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMMITTEE

New Reduced Credit Undergraduate guidelines were presented that would apply to degree programs shorter in time-to-completion and require fewer credit hours, usually between 90 and 100 semester credits or the equivalent. There was considerable discussion on the guidelines and the Executive Council asked staff to go back and review/revise them for discussion at the Council's March meeting.

CHEA RECOGNITION

Chairman Blaine Hansen, Dr. Rae Borden, and I made a presentation to the CHEA Recognition Committee as a part of our recognition. We have been notified that the Recognition Committee will recommend our continued recognition for 7-years. The CHEA Board will vote on that recommendation in January. There is one follow-up to which we will need to provide information.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Nominees to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees were submitted to the membership for their approval. Since a new CEO for SACSCOC is being recruited, in order to retain consistency in the process the entire Executive Council will return for 2025. Mr. Blaine J. Hansen, Executive Vice President for Strategic Operations and Public Relations at Lees-McRae College (NC) will continue as Chair and Dr. Kemba Chambers, President of H. Councill Trenholm State Community College (AL) will continue as Vice Chair.

LEADERSHIP AWARDS

The *James T. Rogers Leadership Award* was awarded to Dr. William T. Luckey, Jr., President of Lindsey Wilson College (KY). Five (5) recipients of the *Carol A. Luthman Meritorious Service Award* were recognized: Mr. Scott A. Bennett, Vice President of Administration and Finance, University of North Florida (FL), Dr. John S. Capps, President, Central Virginia Community College (VA), Dr. Marguerite S. Giguette, Interim Provost and SR. Vice President of Academic Affairs, Xavier University of Louisiana (LA), Dr. Charles D. Lake, Division Chair of Business and Computer Science, Coastal Alabama Community College (AL), and Ms. Jacqui R. Steadman Smith, Vice President of Business and Finance, Milligan University (TN). The *Demetria N. Gibbs Outstanding Chair Award* was awarded to Ms. Jane M. McGuire, Accreditation Specialist, Northeast State Community College (TN).

PEER EVALUATORS

We are in need of additional evaluators in the Library/Learning Resource area. I would greatly appreciate it if you would allow your staff in those areas to be included in our Evaluator Registry. Additionally, please remember that you, too, are requested to provide your expertise to the peer evaluation process.

FAREWELL RECOGNITION

As you know, I will be retiring as President of SACSCOC on July 31, 2025, after 20 years in the position. Since this was my last Annual Meeting as president, In recognition of my years of service, we had a grand reception where a great time was had by all. Additionally, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees has established the Belle S. Wheelan Opportunity Scholarship. Seed money was provided by Dr. Walter Bumphus, Dr. John Roueche, and Mr. Randy Best. Any student enrolled at any SACSCOC member

institution will be able to apply for the funds to cover general supplies, lab supplies, textbooks, laptops or tablets, student fees, room and board, and tuition. Information about how to donate is on the SACSCOC website.

It is impossible to thank everyone for all of the support they have provided me during my tenure as President of SACSCOC but I hope you all know that I have considered it an honor and privilege to do so. I know you will continue to support the peer review process that has guided our work to continue to keep our institutions some of the best in the world. I still have 6.5 months left so, please don't hesitate to call upon me if I can be of assistance to you.

As always, I wish you a productive and safe academic year.