



## TORCH REPORT

# Focused on What Matters the Most

This past month has been a powerful reminder of what is possible when we stay focused on what matters most: students, institutional quality, and continuous improvement.



**Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt**  
SACSCOC President

In every engagement, I have been encouraged by the depth of thought, the willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue, and the shared commitment to ensuring that accreditation continues to serve as a catalyst for progress.

I had the opportunity to deliver keynote remarks at the Technical College System of Georgia Leadership Conference, where we explored how accreditation can drive workforce outcomes through continuous improvement.

The conversation reinforced a central theme we have been advancing: every institution contributes to the workforce in ways aligned with its mission, and our role is to ensure that accreditation both recognizes and strengthens that contribution.

Similarly, my time with the North Carolina Community College System Trustees and Presidents Association Joint Conference provided a valuable opportunity to engage directly with institutional leaders on the evolving role of accreditation.

We discussed not only the importance of maintaining high standards but also how we can continue to reduce unnecessary burden while creating space for innovation.

These conversations are critical as institutions navigate a rapidly changing landscape shaped by workforce demands, federal policy, and student expectations.



SACSCOC President Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt, left, and staff Alexei Matveev, Dr. Robin Zuniga, and Dr. Michelle Madden posed with ACHE President Jim Purcell and University of North Alabama President Ken Kitts at the SACSCOC Road Show on the UNA campus.

### “SACSCOC Road Show” at UNA (pictured above)

We also continued our “SACSCOC Road Show” with a visit to the University of North Alabama. The event brought together a diverse group of institutions from across Alabama for thoughtful conversations on accreditation, federal policy, and continuous improvement.

I am also grateful to our SACSCOC staff, Alexei Matveev, Michelle Madden, and Robin Zuniga, who were on the ground leading sessions, facilitating discussions, and reinforcing our commitment to service.

### Small College Initiative Was a Success

Another highlight of the month was our Small College Initiative convening. This was an incredibly successful gathering that brought together leaders from smaller institutions to focus on recruitment and retention strategies. What stood out most was the level of collaboration and the commitment to leveraging mission differentiation as an asset.

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## Continued Progress on Our Standards Review

Beyond these engagements, our work continues to move forward in meaningful ways. We are making steady progress on revising the Principles of Accreditation, guided by our commitment to clarity, rigor, and innovation.

Our focus remains on aligning standards with outcomes, reducing unnecessary complexity, and ensuring that institutions have the flexibility to fulfill their missions while maintaining high expectations for student success.

These efforts, along with other changes such as the reduction in SubChange and our work to streamline our processes, are helping institutions move more efficiently while preserving the integrity of our processes. This work is grounded in a simple belief: policy should never overshadow purpose.

As we move ahead, I remain focused on building trust, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that SACSCOC is the organization that finds a way to say yes to innovation, while holding firm to the standards that define our work. Accreditation is not a moment; it is a movement. And when we embrace it as such, we create the conditions for continuous improvement and expanded opportunity for the students we serve. Thank you for your continued leadership, your partnership, and your commitment to this work.

**Be Bold, Stay Gold.**



At the SACSCOC Small College Initiative in Atlanta, Vice President Dr. John Donnelly moderated a panel on sustainable enrollment growth with, from left: Lauren Meseroll from South Piedmont Community College, Dr. Tiffany Bellafant Steward from Fisk University, and Dr. Ronnie Stewart from Toccoa Falls College.

## SACSCOC | Staff News



SACSCOC Chief of Staff and USCA Distinguished Chancellor Emerita Dr. Sandra Jordan received the National Collegiate Athletic Association Meritorious Service Award,

## Jordan Earns NCAA Service Award

SACSCOC Dr. Sandra Jordan, chief of staff and vice president, recently received the NCAA Meritorious Service Award for her service as the chancellor of the University of South Carolina Aiken between 2012-2021.

Presented on March 28 by the Peach Belt Conference, the award recognizes individuals who have shown exceptional leadership and service to intercollegiate athletics. Dr. Jordan was honored for her extensive contributions at the national level, including serving as chair of the NCAA Division II Presidents Council, as a member of the NCAA Board of Governors, and as chair of the Peach Belt Conference Presidents Council.

During her time at USCA, Jordan guided the institution through a period of significant growth, innovation, and national recognition.

She also led during the COVID-19 pandemic as a member of the NCAA's highest governing body, where she played a critical role in guiding national policy decisions on health and safety, eligibility, and financial challenges for institutions and student-athletes.

Dr. Jordan has served as SACSCOC's chief of staff and vice president since 2021, where she plays a central role in advancing the Commission's strategic priorities, supporting institutional engagement, and strengthening its accreditation, policy, and member services work.

SACSCOC | Workforce News

# More than 100 Schools Join Workforce Initiative Group

In 2026, SACSCOC launched a major initiative to strengthen how colleges and universities prepare students for the evolving workforce, made possible through a grant from the Lumina Foundation.

The two-year initiative brings together institutions across the SACSCOC membership — including community colleges, public and private universities, and research institutions — to better align academic programs with workforce needs nationwide.

To date, more than **100 SACSCOC member institutions** and **8 systems** have signed on to participate.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, reflecting a shared commitment across our membership to advancing workforce-aligned education and student outcomes.

As this work moves forward, we are taking an intentional approach to scale—focusing on building a strong, engaged cohort that can collaborate effectively, establish best practices, and develop models that can be expanded across the broader membership.

With this foundation in place, we will pause adding new partners after **May 8, 2026**, allowing us to maintain meaningful engagement, support clear communication, and ensure the long-term success of the initiative.

We are grateful for the enthusiasm and interest in this work and look forward to sharing updates and insights with all SACSCOC members as the initiative continues to evolve.

More: Read the [full workforce initiative story here](#).

## Substantive Change:

### Recently approved workforce-aligned programs:

#### Nunez Community College

- Certificate of Technical Studies (CTS) in Construction Management

#### University of North Carolina Charlotte

- Graduate Certificate in Artificial Intelligence Systems Development

#### University of Tennessee Knoxville

- Undergraduate Certificate in Addiction Counseling



July 19–22, 2026  
Hilton Atlanta  
Atlanta, Georgia



Registration is open for this year's **Summer Institute** in Atlanta, GA. The Summer Institute brings together campus leaders, faculty, administrators, and assessment professionals to turn today's challenges into tomorrow's best practices.

#### Summer Institute Themes:

- AI in Higher Ed
- Student Retention and Success
- Assessment Practices
- Workforce and Institutional Mission
- Accreditation Essentials

#### Who Should Attend:

- Higher education professionals who drive institutional quality and student success
- Academic department chairs, deans, provosts, and senior administrators
- Institutional effectiveness and assessment professionals
- Enrollment management and student affairs leaders
- Accreditation liaisons
- Workforce development staff

## Annual Meeting 2026

The SACSCOC Annual Meeting Call for Proposals is now open!

Higher education stands at a pivotal moment, one defined by rapid change, evolving expectations, and extraordinary opportunity.

Inspired by the idea of “new frontiers,” this year's meeting calls on institutions to share what's working, what's changing, and what comes next in accreditation and institutional effectiveness.

Proposal deadline: May 20, 2026  
Learn more [here](#).

#### SACSCOC Annual Meeting:

December 5-8, 2026 | Houston, Texas

# Post-College Success Torch Award: Trinity University

**Trinity University** was an inaugural recipient of a SACSCOC Torch Award for Post-College Success, recognizing the institution's strong outcomes and sustained commitment to preparing students for life after graduation.

Outcome rates for Trinity's Classes of 2021–2025 have consistently ranged from **97%** to **98%**, meaning nearly all graduates are employed or enrolled in graduate school within six months of completing their degree.

"This award speaks to the career readiness of Trinity's graduates and their outcomes," said Katie Ramirez, director of the Center for Experiential Learning and Career Success. "These outcomes reflect sustained institutional investment and infrastructure, ensuring students have access to the career advising, resources, and experiential learning opportunities they need to launch successfully after graduation."

Trinity demonstrated strength across the following post-college success measures:

- Federal loan no-progress rate
- Median earnings 10 years after entry
- Percentage of students earning above the average high school graduate
- Student debt service ratio
- Three-year cohort default rate



"When reviewing how graduates are doing after college, SACSCOC considered factors such as how well alumni are repaying student loans, their typical earnings 10 years after enrolling, and overall debt levels," said Frances Frey, executive director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at Trinity.

Read more about the Torch Awards [here](#) | Read the university's story [here](#).

## COMMUNITY IMPACT:

**Blinn College District's** Dental Hygiene Clinic recently hosted the College's annual Give Kids a Smile (GKAS) event. The event's theme, "Making Every Smile the Main Attraction," created a fun circus environment to help children receiving dental care feel more comfortable.

"We wanted to make visiting the dentist less intimidating, which we hope will lead to a lifetime of good oral health care," said Blinn Dental Hygiene student **Miguel Ponce** (pictured, right), who was one of the co-chairs coordinating this year's event.

This year's event provided 75 local children with care valued at \$25,774, bringing the combined impact of the program to \$319,355 over 17 years.

[Learn more.](#)



**We want to hear from you!** If your campus has recent news you'd like to share, please send a brief description, along with relevant links or photos, to [communications@sacscoc.org](mailto:communications@sacscoc.org).