

Be Bold, Stay Gold in the New Year

As we begin a new year together, I want to offer an update on the work that continues to move this Commission forward and to thank you for the steady commitment you bring to your institutions and to the students you serve. Over the past several months, I've seen firsthand the determination, creativity, and optimism that define our membership, and I remain honored to serve alongside you.



Dr. Stephen Pruitt

December was an especially meaningful month for SACSCOC, as the Board of Trustees concluded its work with several actions that strengthen clarity, streamline processes, and reinforce our mission. I want to highlight a few of these important developments.

One of the most significant actions taken by the Board was the approval of substantial changes to our Substantive Change policy and procedures. These revisions are grounded in clarity, alignment, and trust to ensure our oversight remains rigorous while removing unnecessary barriers for institutions.

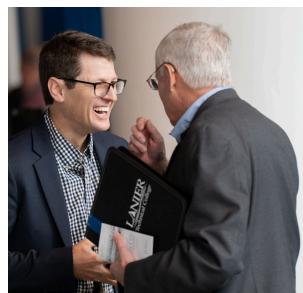
These changes represent a strong step toward the “next evolution of SACSCOC”, one grounded in clarity, responsiveness, and the confidence that our institutions are committed to doing the right things.

Looking Ahead:

Our 100-Day Plan continues to guide our efforts to strengthen service, communication, and cross-team alignment. Work is well underway across multiple initiatives, including the early stages of revising the Principles of Accreditation, a major undertaking that will shape the future of our work and the institutions we serve.



Photos: SACSCOC Annual Meeting | Dec. 2025 | Nashville



With the new standards, expected to be approved in December of 2026, we are suspending all new training on the old standards as we plan to provide training for all new and veteran reviewers beginning in 2027.

Thank you for your continued partnership, your candid feedback, and your commitment to our shared mission. The path ahead is bright, and I'm grateful to walk it with each of you.

Be Bold, Stay Gold!

PRUITT'S LAW OR LORE:

January Preview and What's Next

Dr. Stephen Pruitt's **Law or Lore** weekly blog series continues to address some of the most persistent misunderstandings in accreditation.

In January, the blog series featured installments on Credit for Prior Learning, Hold Harmless for the QEP, and the question "Does SACSCOC Accreditation Stifle Creativity and Innovation?"

In the coming weeks, topics will include Institutional Governance, Using Course Grades as Assessment Evidence, and Using Grades as Meaningful Assessment Evidence.

Read Pruitt's Law or Lore here:
<https://sacscoc.org/law-or-lore-2/>

SACSCOC Leadership and Staff Updates

David L. Barnett, Ph.D., was elected Chair of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at the Annual Meeting. He succeeds Blaine Hanson, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Lees-McRae College.



Dr. David Barnett

Barnett is president of Brenau University. As a member of the SACSCOC Board for five years, Barnett has served in multiple capacities, including as a member of the Board's Executive Council.

Michelle Madden, Ed.D., recently joined SACSCOC as its Director of Substantive Change. Madden has more than a decade of experience in institutional effectiveness and accreditation strategy in higher education. In her new role at SACSCOC, Madden is charged with guiding institutions through multi-faceted compliance requirements and mission aligned academic innovation.



Dr. Michelle Madden

Roslyn Clark Artis, J.D., Ed.D., was elected Vice Chair of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at the Annual Meeting. She succeeds Kemba Chambers, Ed.D., president of Trenholm State Community College in the role.



Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis

Artis has served as President and CEO of Benedict College since 2017 and is the first woman to lead the institution.

SACSCOC In the News:

- Commission president **Dr. Stephen Pruitt** was recently interviewed for an episode of the [Changing Higher Ed](#) podcast that will release **March 3**.
- Dr. Pruitt** will also be a guest panelist at the virtual Future of Accreditation event **February 17** hosted by Eric Kelderman from [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#). Details are [HERE](#).

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees Approved these Major Changes at its Dec. 2025 Meeting:

- **51% of substantive change categories were removed**, reducing complexity and helping institutions more easily determine what is required.
- **7 categories** were reassigned for presidential approval, reducing turnaround time to as little as **one week** after final materials are received.
- First **three-year baccalaureate** degree program approved at the **University of Lynchburg**, and further guidance is coming.
- The **Emergency Temporary Relocation of Instruction** policy has been discontinued.

Congrats to the Inaugural SACSCOC Torch Award winners

We are pleased to announce the recipients of the inaugural SACSCOC Torch Awards!



The awards recognize colleges and universities of every level and size among SACSCOC's more than 780 member institutions. Recipients were selected based on their strength across multiple indicators in each category, rather than overall ranking.

"Students at our member institutions will always be at the forefront of everything we do," SACSCOC President Dr. Stephen Pruitt said. "We're excited to recognize the impact our member institutions make on the lives of students and their communities."

Affordability

- Trident Technical College
- St. Petersburg College
- New College of Florida
- Fayetteville State University
- Northern Kentucky University
- Florida Atlantic University
- University of Florida
- University of the Cumberlands

Student Support and Completion

- Beaufort County Community College
- John A. Gupton College
- Pamlico Community College
- Carolinas College of Health Sciences
- Centre College
- Davidson College
- Wofford College
- Thomas University
- University of Richmond
- Vanderbilt University

The Torch Awards elevate the work of institutions that demonstrate exceptional commitment to access, quality, accountability, and measurable improvement, reflecting SACSCOC's mission to highlight and support student-centered excellence across the region.

Post-College Success

- Marion Military Institute
- Northern Virginia Community College
- Virginia Military Institute
- Trinity University
- Washington and Lee University
- Rice University
- University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

SACSCOC MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Johnston Community College in North Carolina earned the Educational Advisory Board Innovative Institution Award, recognizing its creative leadership, which led to transformational growth in enrollment and student success.

Southeastern Louisiana University recently broke ground on its new Robin Roberts Broadcast Media Center. The new media center is named after renowned journalist and Good Morning America Co-Anchor Robin Roberts, who is an alumna of the university.



San Jacinto College (pictured above) in Pasadena, Texas, has launched a training initiative with Intuitive Machines that will prepare students to support work in biomanufacturing and life sciences in the Houston region.

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.