



TORCH REPORT

Momentum, Mission, Purpose, Progress

March has been a month of meaningful progress, thoughtful engagement, and continued forward momentum across our work.

I remain deeply encouraged by the way our community continues to lean into both the responsibility and opportunity we share to ensure that accreditation serves students, supports institutions, and strengthens public trust.



Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt
SACSCOC President

Executive Council Highlights

A highlight of the past month was our Executive Council meeting on March 11, during which we engaged in substantive, forward-looking discussions. The Council reviewed key elements of the proposed FY27 budget to ensure alignment with our strategic priorities and long-term sustainability.

We also advanced important policy revisions related to Special Committee Procedures and the Teams Report, reinforcing our commitment to clarity, consistency, and fairness in our processes.

In addition, the Council approved the new Reduced Credit Hour Bachelor's Degree policy, an important step that reflects our responsiveness to innovation, workforce needs, and the evolving landscape of higher education, while maintaining our unwavering commitment to rigor and quality.

Monitoring Federal Developments

At the national level, we are closely monitoring developments related to Negotiated Rulemaking from the U.S. Department of Education, particularly as they pertain to accreditation.



SACSCOC President Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt, right, recently visited University of Alabama President Peter Mohler, left, and system and campus leaders to discuss institutional quality, innovation, and student success.

These discussions have the potential to significantly shape our work. As always, we will remain engaged, informed, and proactive, advocating for an accreditation system grounded in student success, institutional innovation, and mission-centered practice.

Reminder of our National Identity and Scope

I also want to clarify an important point in how members describe our work. SACSCOC is a national accreditor.

While we have deep roots and a strong identity within the Southern region, our scope and recognition are national.

Our institutions should reflect this accurately in their materials and avoid references to “regional accreditation.” This is more than a semantic distinction; it speaks to who we are, how we are recognized, and how we position ourselves in the higher education landscape.

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Making Progress on Our Standards Review

I am pleased to share a progress update on our ongoing review of the SACSCOC accreditation standards.

This work reflects our collective commitment to maintaining rigorous, relevant, and responsive standards for the institutions we serve.

Throughout this process, our team has been guided by seven core principles, our "guiding stars," that anchor every decision we make. These principles ensure that our review is not simply an exercise in revision but a purposeful effort to strengthen the value and integrity of accreditation.

The committee is meeting monthly to review standards across all major areas.

Our guiding questions:

- *Does this decision promote student achievement?*
- *Does it advance institutional quality, continuous improvement, and transparency?*
- *Are we focused on outputs rather than processes, trusting institutions to determine how best to achieve results?*
- *Does this decision preserve and reinforce SACSCOC as the gold standard in accreditation?*
- *Have we reduced unnecessary burden on institutions while maintaining rigor?*
- *Have we allowed for appropriate differentiation based on each institution's mission, recognizing the diversity of our member institutions?*
- *Have we created greater opportunities for institutional innovation?*

These questions have proven to be powerful filters. In several instances, they have prompted us to reconsider initial drafts, sharpen our language, or take a more outcomes-focused approach.

Several themes are emerging consistently across workgroups.

- **First**, there is a strong consensus around shifting emphasis from compliance-driven processes to demonstrated outcomes, particularly as they relate to student learning and success.
- **Second**, reviewers have identified opportunities to remove any duplication, consolidate, and clarify standards that have grown in complexity over time. We hope this process will reduce ambiguity for institutions navigating the requirements.



SACSCOC President Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt, center, with presidents from colleges and universities in Kentucky at the 2025 Annual Meeting. From left are: Quentin Young, University of the Cumberlands; DJ Washington, Union Commonwealth; Lee Harrison, Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College; Glenn Sullivan, Sullivan University; Todd Brand, Big Sandy Community & Technical College; Anne Kenworthy, Spalding University; Madison Silvert, Brescia University; and James Cousins, Kentucky Wesleyan College

- **Third**, there is meaningful dialogue about how standards can better accommodate institutional mission diversity without compromising the consistency and credibility that define our accreditation.

The Committee will meet again in April, after which we hope to be at a point where we can share a draft of standards framed by the committee so far in late April or early May and seek feedback from our member institutions and the public.

The committee will work through the summer and provide a full account of the polished standards well in advance of the December Board meeting.

We are grateful for the thoughtful participation of all involved, including our member institutions, who responded to the survey last fall. The survey results have been extremely helpful in guiding the work of the Principles Review Committee. We remain confident that this review will yield standards that are not only stronger but also more clearly aligned with what matters most: the success of students and the continued excellence of our institutions.

Across all of this work, I continue to be inspired by the professionalism, dedication, and shared sense of purpose that define this community. The progress we are making is a direct result of your engagement, your expertise, and your commitment to doing this work well.

Thank you for all that you do and for the support you provide to your students, one another, and to SACSCOC.

Be Bold; Stay Gold.

Meeting Students' Needs: Reduced-Credit Bachelor's

SACSCOC has opened a new pathway for reduced-credit bachelor's degrees, creating more flexible and efficient options for students while maintaining our commitment to quality and rigor.

Under the policy, institutions may offer programs of at least 90 credit hours, provided they demonstrate workforce relevance, strong curricular design, and equivalent learning outcomes.

Institutions should note that reduced-credit bachelor's degrees require approval through the Substantive Change process. Interested in pursuing this pathway? Contact our [Office of Substantive Change](#) for guidance.

More: [Reduced-Credit Undergraduate Degrees FAQ](#)

Lumina Grant Funding SACSCOC Workforce Effort

SACSCOC has launched a workforce alignment initiative, supported by a Lumina Foundation grant, to help institutions design programs with economic realities, workforce needs, and students' lives in mind.

This effort will provide data, tools, and insights to strengthen how institutions assess labor market demand, identify gaps, and align programs with workforce needs. Through research, collaboration, and engagement with workforce and economic development partners, we are creating a framework that helps institutions make informed, future-oriented decisions.

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

Substantive Change: Recently approved workforce-aligned programs:

Pensacola State College

- Applied Technology Diploma in Dental Assisting Technology and Management
- Career Certificate in Diesel Systems Technician

Sam Houston State University

- Level I Certificate in Medical Records
- Level II Certificate in Medical Coding
- Level I Certificate in HVAC Electrical and Controls Technician
- Level I Certificate in Residential HVAC Technician
- Level Certificate in Residential Real Estate
- Certificate in Property Management



July 19–22, 2026
Hilton Atlanta
Atlanta, Georgia

This year's **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

Learn more about the Summer Institute, including registration details, [online here](#).

Pruitt's Law or Lore

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

March Myths, Debunked:

- SACSCOC Only Shows Up When Something is Wrong
- The Multi-Tier Peer Review Process is Just Bureaucracy
- Accreditation is About Counting Library Books
- SACSCOC Staff Really Make the Decisions

Drawing on real experiences from institutions, peer reviewers, and SACSCOC staff, each post brings clarity to how accreditation actually works.

Read Pruitt's Law or Lore [here](#).

Torch Award Spotlight: Carolinas College of Health Sciences

Carolinas College of Health Sciences has been recognized by SACSCOC with a Torch Award for Student Support & Completion, honoring institutions that demonstrate leadership in supporting student persistence, engagement, and successful progression toward completion.

Specifically, Carolinas College of Health Sciences demonstrated strength across the following student support and completion measures:

- Full-time student completion rate within eight years
- Part-time student completion rate within eight years
- Percentage of students earning above the average high school graduate
- Student-to-faculty ratio
- Support staff-to-student ratio

Being among the first recipients of this honor is a significant milestone for Carolinas College.

Interim President Dr. Jodie Huffstetler said the Torch Award reflects the institution's dedication to supporting students from enrollment through graduation and preparing them for successful careers in healthcare.

"Being named a Torch Award recipient by SACSCOC is an extraordinary honor for Carolinas College of Health Sciences. It affirms our student-centered mission and the daily work that leads to completion, licensure readiness, and strong career outcomes," Huffstetler said.



"This recognition truly belongs to everyone at Carolinas College," Huffstetler continued. "It reflects the persistence of our students, the dedication of our faculty and staff, and the support of our clinical and academic partners."

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 its membership.

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

MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Odessa College has been designated a Leader College of Distinction by Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national nonprofit dedicated to advancing community colleges as hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility in their communities.

"Being recertified as a 2026 Leader College of Distinction by Achieving the Dream is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and passion of our entire team and students at Odessa College," Odessa College President Gregory D. Williams said. "This recognition reflects our commitment to empowering students through access to quality education and support, and we are proud to be a part of a community that prioritizes student success."

[Learn more.](#)



Stetson University is increasing access to its programs by expanding its Presidential Fellows program from 25 to 50 students. Fellows receive a renewable scholarship, stipend, and are provided the opportunity to take classes with university president Dr. Christopher Roellke. [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.