



## TORCH REPORT

# Use Your Voice to Shape What's Next

This is a pivotal moment for higher education accreditation, and perhaps more importantly, it is a pivotal moment for all of us as a membership community.

This week, SACSCOC reached an important milestone with the release of the first draft of the revised *Principles of Accreditation*.



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

At the same time, we continue to closely monitor and respond to the evolving federal landscape through the AIM (Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization) Negotiated Rulemaking process. Both efforts have the potential to shape accreditation for years to come, and both require something essential from each of us: engagement.

### ***Principles of Accreditation* Draft Released**

The release of the first draft of the *Principles* is exactly that — a draft.

It reflects the thoughtful and deliberate work of a diverse Principles Review Committee made up of representatives from across our membership, guided by a simple but important set of questions:

- Does this requirement promote student achievement?
- Does it support institutional quality, continuous improvement, and transparency?
- Does it focus on outcomes rather than process for process's sake?
- Does it preserve SACSCOC as the gold standard while reducing unnecessary burden and creating greater space for innovation?



President Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt delivered the commencement address at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Texas.

You will see in this draft a continued emphasis on mission differentiation, student success, workforce alignment, institutional flexibility, and trust in institutional integrity.

You will also notice changes that reflect direct feedback from our membership, including a deliberate effort to reduce unnecessary reporting requirements, streamline expectations, and focus attention on what matters most, student success and institutional quality. But I want to emphasize this clearly: these are your standards. They are not final. They will improve through your voice, your expertise, and your candid feedback.

I strongly encourage every institution to engage deeply in the review process. Read the standards carefully. Discuss them with your leadership teams, faculty, trustees, and accreditation liaisons. Provide honest feedback through the institutional surveys and conversations ahead. Accreditation is strongest when it reflects the collective wisdom of the institutions it serves, and there is no substitute for meaningful engagement from those closest to the work.

### **AIM NegReg Process Reaches Consensus**

At the same time, and as you know, the AIM Negotiated Rulemaking process reached consensus.

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It has been increasingly clear that accreditation is being discussed in ways that emphasize workforce outcomes, student mobility, institutional innovation, accountability for outcomes, reduced burden, and institutional flexibility.

There are also important conversations underway regarding academic freedom, intellectual diversity, governance, competition among accreditors, and the role of student achievement metrics.

Many of these themes align with the strategic direction SACSCOC has already embraced such as reducing unnecessary burden, improving responsiveness, supporting innovation, strengthening workforce contributions, and differentiating expectations by institutional mission.

At the same time, some proposed changes will require thoughtful adaptation, additional guidance, or even revisions to policy and governance structures. As we have throughout this period of change, we will remain transparent, communicative, and focused on helping institutions navigate uncertainty while preserving rigor and quality.

As we process the final document, we will communicate with our members regarding what is changing and how it will affect our institutions and the organization.

### Your Voice Matters, Now More than Ever

I cannot overstate this. This is not a time to sit on the sidelines.

Whether through the *Principles* revision, conversations about federal policy, or our shared work of continuous improvement, your voice matters.

Engagement is not simply participation; it is stewardship. It is how we ensure that accreditation continues to reflect the realities of higher education while protecting students, strengthening institutions, and preserving trust in quality.

As I often say, accreditation is not a moment; it is a movement. And movements only succeed when people lean in together. I hope you will join us in shaping what comes next.

Thank you for your continued leadership, partnership, and commitment to students and institutional excellence.

**Be Bold, Stay Gold.**

## New Office Boosts Member Recruitment

This spring, the Commission opened a department dedicated to recruitment, the development of new pathways to membership, and streamlining services for potential new members.

The Office of New Member Services, headed by Senior Vice President Dr. Patricia L. Donat, is charged with growing the Commission's membership in the United States and abroad.

The office is currently anticipating 8 potential new member institutions over the next year, including some located in states outside the Commission's historic footprint and overseas.

The list also includes a handful of schools currently accredited by other federally recognized accreditors.

"Membership in SACSCOC is highly valued and respected around the world," Donat said. "A lot of institutions see our membership as a way to expand professional development, partnership opportunities, and institutional reputation.

"For international institutions, although recognized in their countries, often by their governments, these institutions are looking for membership in an organization with a reputation like ours.

"We can provide that 'gold' stamp of recognition that many of them are looking for."

Donat said her office has also streamlined several pathways to membership, reducing time-to-membership by 6 to 12 months in some cases.

"In the last year, I've been listening to our candidates to understand their experience with our path to membership," Donat said. "It was a very valuable experience. We've identified some steps we can take to make the process less burdensome without sacrificing what makes us stand out."

Learn more about applying for SACSCOC membership online [here](#).



**Dr. Patricia L. Donat**  
Senior Vice President

# Workforce Initiative Grows with Selection of Interns

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.

As part of the Lumina Foundation grant, the Commission has hired three Atlanta-area graduate student interns to assist in data collection, analysis, and storytelling. They are:

- Naazanin Eftekhari, Georgia State University
- Milton Lewis, Clark Atlanta University
- Anvi Goyal, Georgia Institute of Technology

## Substantive Change:

### Recently approved reduced-credit programs:

#### Our Lady of the Lake University

- Reduced-Hour Bachelor of Arts in Childhood Studies
- Reduced-Hour Bachelor of Arts in Criminology and Criminal Arts
- Reduced-Hour Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
- Reduced-Hour Bachelor of Social Work

### Recently approved workforce-aligned programs:

#### Henderson Community College

- Certificate in Electrical Technology

#### Nunez Community College

- Certificate of Technical Studies in Precision Machining

#### Spalding University

- Certificate in Medical Coding

#### Wayne Community College

- Associate of Applied Science in Building Construction Technology
- Certificate in Middle School Science Residency Licensure
- Certificate in Special Education Residency Licensure
- Certificate in High School Science Residency Licensure
- Certificate in High School Math Residency Licensure
- Certificate in Middle School Math Residency Licensure

#### Temple College

- Multiple Programs



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

Volunteering at the Annual Meeting is a fun, enlightening way to connect with colleagues, support the participant experience, and learn how the magic happens.

Volunteer roles may include:

- Assisting with registration and attendee questions
- Supporting presenters and session rooms
- Serving as greeters or wayfinders
- Helping event staff keep things running smoothly

👉 Interested in volunteering? Complete the Volunteer Interest Survey [here](#).

### SACSCOC Annual Meeting:

December 5-8, 2026 | Houston, Texas

# Affordability Torch Award: St. Petersburg College

**St. Petersburg College** was an inaugural recipient of a SACSCOC Torch Award for Affordability, recognizing the institution's exceptional leadership in managing educational costs while expanding access and long-term value for students. It also reflects sustained, student-centered decision-making and measurable progress across multiple affordability indicators.

Specifically, SPC demonstrated strength in the following affordability indicators:

- Average net price for low-income students
- 10-year net price trends for low-income students
- Five-year change in total cost of attendance
- Overall cost of attendance

Together, these indicators underscore SPC's commitment to providing affordable educational pathways while supporting student success across associate and bachelor's degree programs, workforce training, and transfer pathways.

"We are very proud to serve our community by providing an affordable pathway to high-value associate and bachelor's degrees, as well as articulated transfer pathways to a variety of institutions," said Matthew Liao-Troth, Vice President of Academic Affairs at SPC.



"This recognition reflects our commitment to our students: better jobs, better lives and better communities."

Torch Awards do not represent institutional rankings. Instead, they recognize leadership and measurable progress across multiple affordability indicators, honoring excellence within the diverse missions and contexts of SACSCOC member institutions.

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

## CAMPUS IMPACT:

**Eastern Mennonite University** held its ninth annual Academic and Creative Excellence (ACE) Festival. In lieu of classes, students participate in ACE Festival activities that include poster sessions, presentations, visual and performing art opportunities, an authors' reception for faculty and students, a career fair, and engagement with a keynote speaker.

Interim President Rev. Dr. Shannon W. Dycus described the ACE Festival as a "celebration of student scholarship."

Pictured: Ethan Neufeld, a biology and biochemistry major from Newton, Kansas, presents findings on Salmonella incidence in local egg sources at the ACE Festival.

[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).