



Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANT INSTITUTIONS

- Policy Statement -

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is a regional accrediting agency which accredits institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin America that award associate, baccalaureate, master's and/or doctoral degrees. The Commission also accepts a limited number of applications from international institutions of higher education. The Commission welcomes applications from institutions which are located in these areas and which are prepared to meet other qualifications for membership.

The accreditation procedures outlined in this document apply to degree-granting institutions of higher education which wish to seek accreditation with the Commission on Colleges. Formerly accredited members of the Commission on Colleges which seek to regain membership with the Commission must also follow these same procedures. The philosophy of accreditation by the Commission on Colleges precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education in its region on any basis other than failure to comply with the Core Requirements, the Comprehensive Standards, and the Federal Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* established by the College Delegate Assembly or failure to comply with the policies and procedures of the Commission. The Commission on Colleges uniformly applies the *Principles* to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions.

Communication concerning membership should be addressed to the President of the Commission on Colleges. Applications and a copy of the *Principles of Accreditation* may be secured at the Commission's website, www.sacscoc.org.

The Application:

Documentation of Compliance with the Core Requirements, Designated Sections of the Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*

An institution seeking authorization of a Candidacy Committee must first complete an application documenting its compliance with Core Requirements 2.1–2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7. These requirements are basic expectations of institutions seeking Candidacy. Compliance with these requirements, however, is not sufficient to warrant initial membership. After gaining Candidacy status, institutions must demonstrate both continued compliance with the above requirements and compliance with all of the remaining Comprehensive Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

Note Concerning Substantive Change

An applying institution describes itself in its initial application with the Commission. Therefore, from the date of submission of an application to the date of the granting of membership, if an institution undertakes a substantive change, as defined by the Commission policy "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges," it will have significant impact on the accreditation process. If an institution chooses to implement a substantive change after submitting an application, but prior to gaining authorization to receive a Candidacy Committee, the institution will be required to submit a new application which describes the change. If an institution implements a substantive change after it has been authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee but prior to the granting of Candidacy, its authorization may be revoked at the discretion of the Commission. If an institution implements a substantive change during its Candidacy period, the status of Candidacy may be revoked at the discretion of the Commission. Should Candidacy be revoked, the institution may reapply at any time.

Note Concerning Documentation of Compliance with Core Requirement 2.11

In addition to providing narrative describing its compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1, an institution must include with its application separate institutional audits and management letters for its three most recent fiscal years, including that for the fiscal year ending immediately prior to the date of submission of the application. The institution also must provide with the application an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board, and a schedule of changes in unrestricted net assets, excluding plant and plant related debt (short and long term debt attached to physical assets). Further, the institution must provide a separate audit and management letter for the most recent fiscal year ending prior to any committee visit for Candidacy, Candidacy renewal, or initial Membership. All audits must be conducted by independent certified public accountants or an appropriate governmental auditing agency.

An applicant or Candidate institution must not show an annual or cumulative operating deficit at any time during the application process or at any time during Candidacy.

(These documents are also required of member institutions and are referenced in Core Requirement 2.11.1).

General Steps in the Process for Achieving Initial Membership

1. *Attendance at a Workshop for Pre-Applicant Institutions*

An institution planning to submit an application must attend a one day workshop at the Commission offices. Information about the workshop can be obtained by calling or writing the Commission on Colleges or by visiting the Commission's website. Institutions interested in understanding the process in order to determine whether to apply or not may also wish to attend a workshop. The workshop acquaints attendees with the accreditation process and with the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements.

2. *Submission of an Application by the Institution and Initial Review by the Commission*

An institution seeking membership must first submit an application describing the characteristics of the institution and documenting its compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7. The application is initially reviewed by Commission staff and then by peer reviewers.

3. *Authorization by the Commission of a Candidacy Committee*

When the Commission determines that the institution has demonstrated compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7, it will authorize a Candidacy Committee to visit the institution. The Candidacy Committee verifies on site the documentation presented in the application and writes a report that is forwarded to the Committee on Compliance and Reports for review and consideration of Candidacy status for the institution. The institution has a minimum of two weeks to respond to the Candidacy Committee Report if it wishes to do so. If it responds to the report, the response will also be forwarded to the Committee on Compliance and Reports. If the Commission determines that the institution is not in compliance with any of the above requirements, it will deny authorization of a Candidacy Committee. Denial of authorization of a Candidacy Committee visit by the Commission is not appealable. The institution may submit a new application whenever it wishes.

4. *Granting of Candidacy Status by the Commission*

The institution is granted Candidacy status upon recommendation of the Committee on Compliance and Reports and subsequent action by the Commission indicating that the institution has demonstrated compliance with the requirements of the application and that this compliance has been verified by a Candidacy Committee which has visited the institution.

Candidacy is effective on the date of Commission action to grant Candidacy.

If Candidacy is denied, the institution must submit a new application along with application fees and must be authorized to receive another Candidacy Committee visit before being considered again for Candidacy. Denial of Candidacy is appealable.

5. *Completion by the Institution of a Compliance Certification*

When Candidacy is granted, the institution must complete a Compliance Certification documenting continued compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7 and must document compliance with the remainder of the Comprehensive Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* and receive an Accreditation Committee visit within the two years following the date the institution was granted Candidacy status. The report of the Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to the recommendations in that report are sent to the Commission for one of the following actions: grant membership, continue the institution in Candidacy status for a maximum of two more years, or remove the institution from Candidacy. Removal from Candidacy is an appealable action. If the Appeals Committee's final decision is to reverse the Commission's decision to remove the institution from Candidacy, the institution remains in Candidacy, receives another Accreditation Committee visit, and within two years is again considered for membership by the Commission.

If the institution is granted Continued Candidacy, an Accreditation Committee will again visit the institution within the next two years of Candidacy. The report of that Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to that report will be sent to the Commission for action either granting or denying membership. If the decision of the Commission is to deny membership, the institution will be removed from Candidacy. This action is appealable. The institution may apply for membership immediately following the Commission decision or, if the institution appeals the decision, after the Appeals Committee's final decision to drop the institution from Candidacy. If the Appeals Committee's final decision is to reverse the Commission's decision to remove the institution from Candidacy, the institution is granted membership status.

6. *Granting by the Commission of Membership Status*

An institution which has been granted Candidate status is granted membership when the Commission judges that the institution has complied with Core Requirements 2.1–2.11, has documented compliance with all of the Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation* and has been in operation, i.e., has without interruption enrolled students in degree programs through at least one complete degree program cycle, and has graduated at least one class at the level of the highest degree offered by the institution prior to action of the Commission.

Membership is retroactive to January 1 of the year in which accreditation is awarded by the Commission.

An institution is granted membership only for those purposes and programs in place at the time of initial accreditation. Before a member institution implements a substantive change, as defined by the Commission policy "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges," it must report the change to the President of the Commission on Colleges.

The institution's accreditation must be reaffirmed five years after it is granted initial membership. Prior to reaffirmation, the institution must submit for review by an Off Site Reaffirmation Committee a Compliance Certification documenting compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, all of the Comprehensive Standards, and the Federal Requirements of the Principles of Accreditation. It must also complete a Quality Enhancement Plan (Core Requirement 2.12) for review during a visit by an On Site Reaffirmation Committee.

Specific Procedures in the Process for Achieving Initial Membership

1. The institution secures an application for membership, a copy of the *Principles of Accreditation*, and other materials as well as information concerning the pre-applicant workshop by writing or calling the offices of the Commission on Colleges or by visiting the website of the Commission (www.sacscoc.org).
2. Representatives of the institution attend a workshop for pre-applicant institutions.
3. The institution provides all information requested in the Application Form. The completed Application constitutes a primary source of information used by the Commission on Colleges to determine apparent compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7. (See **Note Concerning Documenting Compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1** above.)
4. A staff member will review the completed Application Form and will provide the institution with a written assessment.

If additional information is needed, the institution will be requested to provide it.

If the staff member determines that the institution does not appear to comply with any or all of the requirements, the institution will be given a choice of withdrawing its application or requesting that it be referred to one of the Committees on Compliance and Reports (the review committees of the Commission on Colleges). Upon recommendation of the review committee, the Commission will then either deny authorization or authorize a Candidacy Committee visit.

If the staff member determines that the institution appears to be in compliance with the requirements, the President of the Commission can authorize the visit of a Candidacy Committee. This Candidacy Committee will consist of at least five members and will ascertain on site that the institution does meet Core Requirements 2.1–2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7.

The application review process (beginning with receipt of the completed application and ending with authorization of the Candidacy Committee) normally can be accomplished within a period of twelve to eighteen months. The maximum period from the time the initial application is received by the Commission on Colleges to the time that the Candidacy Committee is authorized (either by the President of the Commission or the Committee on Compliance and Reports) should not exceed 18 months. Should the institution not receive authorization for a Candidacy Committee visit within 18 months after submitting its initial application materials, its application may be withdrawn at the discretion of the Commission. Should the institution wish to reapply at a future time, it will be required to submit a new application along with the appropriate application fee.

After authorization, the visit of the Candidacy Committee and the subsequent decision of the Committee on Compliance and Reports may take as long as twelve months.

5. The Candidacy Committee, consisting of at least five members, will visit the institution to review documentation of compliance with Core Requirements 2.1–2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7. This Committee will write a report which will be forwarded to the Committee on Compliance and Reports. The institution may respond to the Candidacy Committee Report, and if it responds, the response will also be forwarded to the Committee on Compliance and Reports. Upon recommendation of the Committee on Compliance and Reports, the Commission, on the basis of the institution's application and the Candidacy Committee report and the institution's response, will either grant Candidacy or deny Candidacy.
6. If the Commission denies Candidacy, the institution may appeal the action. If the appeal is denied, the institution may apply again at its discretion.
7. If the Commission grants Candidacy, the institution will be authorized to complete a Compliance Certification documenting continuing compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1, and Federal Requirements 4.1-4.7 and to document compliance with the remainder of the Comprehensive Standards and receive an Accreditation Committee visit. In order for the institution to maintain Candidacy status, this visit and subsequent action by the Commission must occur within two years of the time that the institution is granted Candidacy. Prior to the institution's completion of the Compliance Certification, the staff member assigned to the institution will visit it for the purpose of conducting an orientation to the process. An institution may be in Candidacy status for a maximum of four years.
8. After the institution completes a Compliance Certification, the institution will receive an Accreditation Committee visit. The chair of the Accreditation Committee will make a preliminary visit to the institution approximately two months in advance of the committee visit.
9. The Accreditation Committee will evaluate the extent of the institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and the institution's potential for achieving accreditation. The Accreditation Committee report will be sent to the Commission staff member and to the institution. The chief executive officer of the institution will be invited to review the report and to prepare a written response to recommendations in

the report. The response must be submitted no later than the date requested for consideration at the next meetings of the Committees on Compliance and Reports and the Commission on Colleges.

10. The Accreditation Committee report, the institution's response to the report, and the chair's written review of the institution's response, will be reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports. At that time, the institution may be invited to send representatives for a meeting on the record. (If an institution is in its fourth year of Candidacy, representatives from the institution will be invited for a meeting on the record.)

The Committee on Compliance and Reports may recommend to the Commission that the institution be granted Continued Candidacy if the institution provides strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the *Principles of Accreditation* and that it will fully comply with the *Principles* within four years despite the existence of issues of non-compliance cited by the Accreditation Committee.

If an institution is granted Continued Candidacy, it will be visited again by an Accreditation Committee and considered by the Committee on Compliance and Reports within two years. In preparation for that committee visit, the institution will address issues of non-compliance cited by the first Accreditation Committee and will update information in its Compliance Certification.

The Committee on Compliance and Reports will recommend membership if the institution has complied with Core Requirements 2.1–2.11, the Comprehensive Standards, and the Federal Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

The Committee on Compliance and Reports will recommend removal from Candidacy if the institution has failed to comply with Core Requirements 2.1–2.11 and/or has failed to provide strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the Comprehensive Standards and/or Federal Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*. An institution removed from Candidacy may submit another application at its discretion.

11. The Committee on Compliance and Reports makes recommendations concerning an institution's status to the Executive Council of the Commission which, in turn, makes its recommendation to the Commission on Colleges which takes final action on the institution's status.
12. An institution may withdraw its application or its status as a Candidate institution at any time prior to the decision of the Commission on Colleges. If an institution withdraws its application and later decides to seek membership, it must submit a new application and follow the procedures outlined above as they apply to institutions seeking status with the Commission on Colleges.
13. It is the policy of the Commission on Colleges that an applying institution bears the following expenses: travel, meals, and lodging for members of a Candidacy Committee and members of all subsequent Accreditation Committees and the accompanying Commission staff representative; \$200 to the chair and \$100 to each Committee member for miscellaneous expenses incurred during the visit; and clerical expenses necessary for the chairs of committees to complete reports. The total cost of visits is billed to the institution by the Association following the visit.

Fees for Applicant and Candidate Institutions

Because of staff and Commission involvement with applicant institutions beginning at the time an institution submits its application, the following fees apply:

For national institutions:

Application Fee	\$10,000
Candidacy Fee	2,500

For international institutions:

Application Fee	\$15,000
Candidacy Fee	2,500

The **Application Fee** must accompany the application submitted by the institution. It covers costs associated with the application review and consultation with staff.

When an institution is authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee, it is assessed a **Candidacy Fee** of \$2,500. This fee covers costs associated with staff involvement in the accreditation process and assembling a Candidacy Committee.

In addition, candidate and member institutions are assessed annual dues using a formula based on enrollment and on educational and general expenditures beginning with the term in which candidate or membership status is awarded.

Approved: Commission on Colleges, December 2002
Updated and Edited for the Principles of Accreditation: Commission on Colleges, December 2003
Updated: January 2007
Revised: Commission on Colleges, June 2008
Edited: January 2009