



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

DISCLOSURE OF ACCREDITING DOCUMENTS AND ACTIONS OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES (SACSCOC)

- Policy -

I. The Compliance Certification, the Quality Enhancement Plan, and Monitoring Reports

An institution may release for internal or public distribution the contents of its Compliance Certification or its Quality Enhancement Plan. The Commission may also allow Compliance Certifications and Quality Enhancement Plans to be used by educators who are conducting research, the purpose of which is the improvement of the accrediting process. The U. S. Department of Education and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation may be allowed access to these documents, but only in conjunction with the process of recognition of the Commission by either of these agencies.

Monitoring reports submitted by institutions will not be released to the public by the Commission except as noted under Item V of this document. These reports, however, may be released by the institution after action has been taken by the Commission.

II. Visiting Committee Reports

An institution may release its visiting committee report. Quotation in institutional publications or excerpts from the visiting committee report must also be accompanied by a note stating that a copy of the entire report can be obtained from the institution. If an institution publicly characterizes the findings of a visiting committee report, the institution must also state that a copy of the entire report can be obtained from the institution.

Whether the institution releases the entire report or excerpts, the release must include the title page of the report and the following Commission statement that has been incorporated on the title page:

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges is responsible for making the final determination on accreditation based on the findings contained in this report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the *Principles of Accreditation* and on the accreditation status of the institution rest with SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

The Commission will not release visiting committee reports to the public, except as noted under Item V of this document. With the approval of the institution, the Commission may allow access to a report by those conducting research, the purpose of which is the improvement of accreditation. For purposes of the recognition process only, visiting committee reports of member and applicant institutions may be examined by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The Commission may also share the visiting committee reports with other accrediting commissions of higher education.

III. Disclosure by the Commission on Colleges of Institutional Accreditation Documents to Third Parties

Requests for disclosure—by other agencies, institutions, or individuals—of any institutional accrediting documents may be granted only upon the receipt of written approval of disclosure by the subject institution or after proper subpoena and/or court order. If disclosure is sought by subpoena and/or court order, the institution whose documents are being requested will be notified of the request immediately to enable the institution to file its objections to the appropriate court.

IV. Minutes and Correspondence

Minutes of the Executive Council shall be accessible to members of the Council and the Commission's Board of Trustees. Minutes of the Commission's Board of Trustees and the College Delegate Assembly shall be published on the Commission's Web page or in the *Proceedings of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools*. Minutes of the Committees on Compliance and Reports and *ad hoc* committees shall be accessible to members of the Executive Council and the Board of Trustees.

An institution which has officially appealed an adverse action of the Commission's Board of Trustees will have access to those sections of official minutes that pertain to the adverse action.

The Commission will not release correspondence with member and applicant institutions except under exceptional circumstances as decided by the President of SACSCOC or the Executive Council or as noted under Item V of this document.

The Commission may share correspondence between members or applicant institutions with other accrediting commissions of higher education, or with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or the U. S. Department of Education in conjunction with the recognition process.

V. Public Statements by Institutions

In accord with federal regulation 34 CFR 602.23, if an institution elects to disclose its accredited or candidate status granted by the Commission's Board of Trustees, the institution must disclose an accurate statement of status, including the specific degree levels covered by that status and the name, address, and telephone number of the accrediting agency. The institution is required to comply with related statements in the *Principles of Accreditation*.

If an institution uses the public forum to take issue with an official action (relating to that institution) of the Commission on Colleges or with related activities, or provides incorrect or misleading information about its accredited or candidate status or about the contents of visiting committee reports or about the Board of Trustees accrediting action with regard to the institution, then the President of SACSCOC may make available to the public relevant information, including peer review committee reports and notification letters.

In addition, the President of SACSCOC may refer the case to the Board of Trustees for action on the institution's accreditation. This provision does not apply to the announcement by an institution that it intends to appeal an adverse action.

VI. Information Required by the U.S. Department of Education, the Appropriate State Licensing or Authorizing Agency, and the Appropriate Accrediting Agencies

In accordance with 34 CFR Section 602.26, the Commission provides the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, appropriate State licensing or authorizing agencies, and appropriate accrediting agencies written notice of the following decisions and actions:

- a. decisions on initial or renewed accreditation (notification within 30 days of the Board of Trustee's decisions)

- b. final decisions on probation or warning (public sanctions), or final decisions to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate accreditation or candidacy (notification same time as informing the institution, not to exceed 30 days after the decision)
- c. a brief statement by the Commission summarizing reasons for denial, withdrawal, suspension, or termination and the official comments, if any, that the affected institution may wish to make with regard to that decision, or evidence that the affected institution has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment (notification within 60 days of the decision)
- d. decision of an institution's voluntary withdrawal from accreditation or candidacy or an accreditation suspension (notification within 30 days of the decision).

In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR 602.27, the Commission submits, upon request from the U.S. Secretary of Education, information regarding an accredited or candidate institution's compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including its eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA programs, for the purpose of assisting the Secretary in resolving problems with the institution's participation in these programs. In addition, the Commission submits the name of any institution it accredits that the Commission has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse and the reason for the Commission's concern.

The Commission will inform the institution when it submits the institution's name to the Secretary for any of the reasons cited above unless either of the following conditions apply: (1) Commission staff has reviewed the institutional case and the issues presented by the U.S. Department of Education and has concluded that confidentiality is necessary to resolve issues identified by the Department or (2) the Department specifically requests that the contact remain confidential.

In accordance with federal regulation 602.28, the Commission, upon request, shares with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation and candidacy status of an institution, and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited or candidate institution.

The application of SACS Commission on Colleges for recognition constitutes a grant of authority to the U.S. Secretary of Education to conduct site visits and to gain access to Commission records, personnel, and facilities on an announced or unannounced basis (CFR 602.10(b)).

VII. Information Released to the Public

The Commission provides to the public written notice of the following decisions and actions:

- a. decisions on initial or renewed accreditation (notification within 30 days of the Board of Trustees decision)
- b. final decisions on probation or warning (public sanctions), or final decisions to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate accreditation or candidacy (notification within 24 hours of informing the institution)
- c. a brief statement summarizing reasons for denial, withdrawal, suspension, or termination and the official comments, if any, that the affected institution makes regarding the action (notification upon request)
- d. decisions of an institution's voluntary withdrawal from accreditation or candidacy or an accreditation suspension (notification upon request).

The Commission maintains and makes available to the public the following documents: *Principles for Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, "Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions," "Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports," and "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges." See Commission's web site (www.sacscoc.org).

VIII. Required notices and documents submitted to the U.S. Department of Education

In accordance with 34 CFR 602.27, the Commission on Colleges notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education of any changes to policies, procedures, and standards that affect the Commission's scope of recognition with the U.S. Department of Education or its compliance with the criteria for recognition.

In addition, the Commission submits the following documents to the U.S. Department of Education: a copy of its Annual Report; a copy of its directory of accredited and candidate institutions, as updated annually; and, upon request by the Secretary, a summary of the Commission's major accrediting activities during the previous year.

IX. Information about member or applying institutions made available to the public

The Commission will release the following information about member or applying institutions:

- a. For all institutions, the name of the institution, current accreditation status (applicant, candidate, member), address and contact numbers, degree levels offered, approximate enrollment, and type of governance
- b. For a member institution, the date of initial candidacy (if applicable), initial accreditation, recent reaffirmation of accreditation, and next reaffirmation of accreditation
- c. For an applicant or candidate institution, the date of authorization of a candidacy committee, date of initial candidacy, date of candidacy renewal, and the date of initial membership
- d. The date and type (candidacy, initial accreditation, reaffirmation, substantive change, special) of an institution's most recent on-site evaluation, subsequent Board of Trustee action, specific areas of the *Principles* identified for continued monitoring (if applicable), and authorization of a special committee resulting from Board of Trustee action (if applicable)
- e. Date of submission and type of institution's most recent monitoring report, subsequent Commission action, specific areas of the *Principles* identified for continued monitoring (if applicable), and authorization of a special committee resulting from Board of Trustee action (if applicable)
- f. Due date and type of institution's next monitoring report (if applicable) resulting from previous Commission review of an on-site evaluation or of a monitoring report
- g. The date and nature of any negative action taken by the Board of Trustees (warning, probation, denial of reaffirmation, denial of authorization of a candidacy committee, denial of approval of substantive change) and the reasons for the action citing specific areas of the *Principles*
- h. The date and nature of any adverse action taken by the Board of Trustees (the appealable actions of denial of candidacy, removal from candidacy, denial of membership, removal from membership) and the reasons for the action citing specific areas of the *Principles*
- i. For an adverse action, whether the institution has appealed and, if applicable, the date of the appeal
- j. Any action of the Appeals Committee of the College Delegate Assembly and the effective date of the decision

The Commission will post on its Web page disclosure statements for the following actions regarding the accreditation status of institutions: (1) institutions placed or continued on Warning or Probation, (2) institutions removed from accreditation or candidacy, (3) institutions denied initial candidacy or accreditation, (4) institutions denied authorization of a candidacy committee, and (5) special committees authorized separate from another Board of Trustee action. Such a statement will disclose the following information about an institution: (1) the status of the institution, (2) the definition of the Board of Trustee

action taken, (3) the reason for the action, (4) the next step in the institution's review, and (5) any other recent action taken by the Board of Trustees that can be disclosed.

If the Board of Trustees removes an institution from candidacy or membership, the Commission may release a statement to the institution's academic community informing faculty, staff, students and other affected parties of the decision of the Commission and reasons for the action.

X. Information made available during the Business Meeting of the College Delegate Assembly

The names of institutions acted upon by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees during the its summer and annual meeting will be read during the Business Meeting of the College Delegate Assembly. Those actions are listed below. When announcing appealable actions during the College Delegate Assembly Business Meeting, the reading will be prefaced using the following statement: "Appealable actions do not go into effect until the appeal period of ten days following notification has expired. If the institution appeals within this time period, it maintains the status held prior to the Board of Trustee decision until the appeal has been resolved."

- a. Reaffirmation of accreditation
- b. Denial of reaffirmation, continuation of accreditation, and imposition of Warning or Probation
- c. Awarding of initial membership
- d. Denial of initial membership
- e. Awarding of initial candidacy
- f. Removal from candidacy
- g. Denial of candidacy
- h. Removal from Warning or Probation
- i. Imposition or continuation of Warning or Probation
- j. Removal from membership

XI. Information Published in the *Proceedings* and on the Commission's Web Site

The following Board of Trustee actions will be published in the *Annual Report* and on the Commission's Web page:

- a. Reaffirmation of accreditation
- b. Denial of reaffirmation, continuation of accreditation, and imposition of Warning or Probation
- c. Awarding of initial membership
- d. Denial of initial membership
- e. Awarding of initial candidacy
- f. Renewal of candidacy status (within the four-year period)
- g. Removal from candidacy

- h. Denial of candidacy
- i. Authorization of a Candidacy Committee
- j. Denial of authorization to host a Candidacy Committee
- k. Approval of substantive change
- l. Continued accreditation following review of substantive change
- m. Denial of approval of substantive change
- n. Removal from Warning or Probation
- o. Imposition or continuation of Warning or Probation
- p. Removal from membership
- q. Authorization of a Special Committee (*separate from another Board of Trustee action*)
- r. Continued accreditation following review by a Special Committee (*separate from another Board of Trustee action*)

Where appropriate, written announcements will include those actions which have been appealed by including the following statement: "Subsequent to the official action of SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the institution has appealed the decision. Until the decision of the Appeals Committee is final, the institution maintains the status held prior to the Commission's appealable action."

Document History

Approved: Commission on Colleges, December 2002

Revised: Commission on Colleges, June 2003, June 2004, December 2004, and December 2006

Revised: Board of Trustees, June 2011