



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

INTEGRITY AND ACCURACY IN INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION

- Policy Statement -

Institutional integrity serves as the foundation of the relationship between the Commission on Colleges and its member and candidate institutions. This fundamental philosophy is reflected in the *Principles of Accreditation* as follows:

Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member and candidate institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions.

Integrity in the accreditation process is best understood in the context of peer review, professional judgment by peers of commonly accepted sound academic practice, and the conscientious application of the *Principles of Accreditation* as mutually agreed upon standards for accreditation. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions and for institutions to make reasonable and responsible decisions consistent with the spirit of integrity in all matters. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information to the public, failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission, or failing to conduct a candid self-assessment of compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and to submit this assessment to the Commission, and other similar practices will be seen as the lack of a full commitment to integrity. The Commission's policy statement "Integrity and Accuracy in Institutional Representation" gives examples of the application of the principle of integrity in accreditation activities. The policy is not all-encompassing nor does it address all possible situations. Failure of an institution to adhere to the integrity principle may result in a loss of accreditation or candidacy.

The *Principles* includes the following requirement:

PI 1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters.

As a condition of candidacy or membership in the Commission on Colleges, the institution agrees to document its compliance with the requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*; to comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies; and to make complete, accurate and honest disclosure to the Commission.

The Commission's policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership" states that the Commission on Colleges requires a member institution to comply with the Principle of Integrity, Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, Federal Requirements, and Commission policies and procedures, and to provide information as requested by the Commission in order to maintain membership and accreditation. The policy also states:

Failure to respond appropriately to Commission decisions and requests or to make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, including the denial or revocation of candidacy or accreditation. (p. 1)

In order to comply with these requirements for integrity and accuracy in reporting in its relationships with the Commission, the president of the institution is obligated to review and ensure the accuracy and integrity of materials submitted by the institution, such as the Compliance Certification and Quality Enhancement Plan. In addition, an institution shall meet the following expectations:

1. Ensure that all documents submitted to the Commission are candid and provide all pertinent information, whether complimentary or otherwise. With due regard for the rights of individual privacy, every institution applying for candidacy, extension of candidacy, accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation, as well as every candidate and accredited institution, provide the Commission with access to all parts of its operations, and with complete and accurate information about the institution's affairs, including reports of other accrediting, licensing, and auditing agencies.
2. Respond in a timely manner to requests by the Commission for submission of dues, fees, reports, or other information.
3. Ensure that information submitted to the Commission (such as that provided in the annual institutional profile, institutional responses to visiting committee reports, and monitoring reports) is complete, accurate, and current.
4. Cooperate with the Commission in preparation for visits, receives visiting committees in a spirit of collegiality, and complies with the Commission's requests for acceptable reports and self-analyses.
5. Report substantive changes, including the initiation of new programs or sites outside the region, or new sites within the region in accordance with the Commission policy on substantive change.
6. Report accurately to the public its status and relationship with the Commission.
7. Provide counsel and advice to the Commission, and agree to have its faculty and administrators serve, within reason, on visiting teams and on Commission committees.
8. Provide the Commission or its representatives with information requested and maintains an openness and cooperation during evaluations, enabling evaluators to perform their duties with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

The Commission accredits institutions, not individuals. Therefore, any individual who reports to the Commission on behalf of an institution—either by virtue of his or her office or as delegated by the chief executive officer of the institution—obligates the institution in all matters regarding institutional integrity.

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