



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

REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION AND SUBSEQUENT REPORTS

- Policy Statement -

All institutions accredited by the Commission on Colleges are required to undergo a review for reaffirmation of accreditation every ten years. After being granted initial accreditation by the Commission, new member institutions will be reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation after five years, then every ten years thereafter. The Commission's review of institutions between decennial reaffirmation reviews in accordance with policies governing special committee visits and substantive change visits normally will not alter the specified date for the decennial reaffirmation review. (See policy statements "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions" and "Special Committee Procedures and Team Report.")

The Commission reaffirms the accreditation of an institution as a totality. This accreditation extends beyond the parent campus to include all centers, branches, campuses, or other sites at which postsecondary degree or non-degree work is offered as well as all work offered through electronic delivery methods. The institution must include the review of all its operations in its Compliance Certification and the Commission will review them during the institution's reaffirmation.

The reaffirmation review will be conducted in accordance with procedures outlined in pertinent Commission documents including handbooks and other policies. (See, for example, the *Principles of Accreditation* and the *Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*.) The process will include compiling and submitting a Compliance Certification documenting compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and submitting a Quality Enhancement Plan for review by peer review committees.

During the reaffirmation of accreditation process and in all other relationships with the Commission and with their other constituencies, member institutions are expected to maintain integrity, to abide by the *Principles of Accreditation* and all Commission policies and procedures, to provide the Commission complete and accurate information about institutional operations, to be candid and thorough in their own self-evaluations, to accept an honest and forthright peer assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses, and to cooperate fully with the Commission during all aspects of the process of evaluation in an atmosphere of openness that enables peer evaluators to perform their duties with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Review of Distance Learning during the Reaffirmation Process

Institutions will include the review of their distance learning programs in the Compliance Certification that will be reviewed by the Off-Site Review Committee. The On-Site Review Committee will validate the content of the Compliance Certification and the pertinent findings of the Off-Site Review Committee. In its review, the On-Site Committee will determine whether the institution has adequate support services and personnel to operate distance learning programs effectively. (See also the Commission's policy on substantive change pertinent to distance learning.)

Review of Off-Campus Sites during the Reaffirmation Process

Federal regulations require visits to institutional off-campus sites and other campuses as a part of the institution's decennial review. The Commission staff member will select a representative sample of sites at which fifty percent or more of a program is offered (taking into account such factors as geographic dispersion and number of students and programs at each site) to be visited. The site visitors, normally two per site, will usually be members of the On-Site Committee. These visits will be completed either before or during the visit of the On-Site Committee to the main campus.

The purpose of the visit to the off-campus site(s) is to determine whether or not the institution has adequate personnel, facilities, and resources to operate the off-campus site(s). The site visitors, therefore, will interview relevant faculty and staff at the site(s) with particular attention to student access to full-time faculty, review facilities, and review appropriateness of other support activities such as library/learning resources and student services *vis-à-vis* the programs offered at the site(s), and any other pertinent compliance issues emerging from the Off-Site Committee report. The visitors will insure that the institution has demonstrated sufficiently the comparability of student learning outcomes with those for the same or similar programs on the main campus. The institution would have included and addressed its instructional sites and campuses in its Compliance Certification. The Compliance Certification would have been reviewed by the Off-Site Committee before these site visits.

If the site visitors discover non-compliance with any pertinent standard(s) in the *Principles of Accreditation*, an appropriate narrative and Recommendation will be drafted and submitted to the full On-Site Committee for consideration and possible inclusion in the Reaffirmation Committee Report. In addition, an introductory paragraph describing the review of the off-campus site(s) and any differences from the main campus noted by the visiting committee will be included in the Reaffirmation Committee Report.

Institutional Reports Submitted after Reaffirmation

Each member institution is expected to submit a formal response to the report of the On-Site Review Committee that demonstrates corrective action to the recommendations made by the Committee. If the institution's response reveals continued noncompliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, the Commission will request submission of monitoring reports until compliance is demonstrated. The maximum period for submitting monitoring reports is two years. At the discretion of the Commission, the institution is subject to sanctions for non-compliance during the monitoring period and potentially to loss of accreditation at any time for noncompliance, particularly if compliance is not demonstrated during the two-year monitoring period. (See policy statement "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership.")

Each member institution also is expected to submit a Fifth-Year Interim Report five years after its last reaffirmation review reporting on continued compliance with Commission standards and on the effects of the implementation of its Quality Enhancement Plan on student learning. (See policy statement "Reports Submitted for Committee or Commission Review.") The Commission will notify institutions regarding the completion of this report.

Delay or Change of Reaffirmation Dates

Member institutions may not depart from the regular decennial review schedule except under extraordinary circumstances and then only by formal request to and approval by the President of the Commission. Normally, change in institutional executive leadership will not constitute adequate reason for delaying or rescheduling the review. The President of the Commission and the Executive Council of the Commission on Colleges retain the authority to delay or reschedule an institution's reaffirmation review for reasons deriving from particular circumstances either at the institution or within the Commission, including but not necessarily limited to balancing the workload within the Commission and its staff or other unusual circumstances. If an institution is on Probation at the time of its scheduled review for reaffirmation of accreditation before the Commission, the President of the Commission may defer action on reaffirmation pending resolution of the institution's probationary status.

Separate Accreditation for Units of Member Institutions

All extended units related to the parent campus through corporate or administrative control must be evaluated during reviews for institutions seeking candidacy, initial membership, or reaffirmation of accreditation. If an extended unit is sufficiently autonomous, it or the parent institution may request separate accreditation, or if the Commission determines that an extended unit is autonomous to the extent that control over that unit by the parent or its board is significantly impaired, the Commission may direct the extended unit to seek separate accreditation. (See policy statement "Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution.")

Review of Institutional Units in a System

If an institution is part of a system or corporate structure, a description of the system operation must be submitted as part of the Compliance Certification for the decennial review. The description should be designed to help members of the peer review committees understand the mission, governance, and operating procedures of the system and the individual institution's role within that system.

Exception to Core Requirement 2.7.4

Core Requirement 2.7.4 of the *Principles of Accreditation* mandates that a member institution provide "instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees" or provide an alternative approach to meeting this requirement. The Commission must approve any alternative approach. Each institution in this category must request the exception and submit supporting documentation at the time the degree program starts and again as part of the Compliance Certification submitted at the time of each reaffirmation of accreditation review. (See policy statement "Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alternative Approach.")

Unreported Substantive Changes Discovered or Reported during Reaffirmation

If an institution fails to report a substantive change that requires prior approval or prior notification and that unreported substantive change is discovered between submission of the institution's Compliance Certification and the conclusion of the on-site review, the institution will receive a recommendation from the On-Site Review Committee and will be referred to the Commission for action. Action on the substantive change may include the imposition of sanctions. (See policy statement "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions.")

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