



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

RECORDS MAINTENANCE POLICY OF THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

- Policy Statement -

The Commission on Colleges maintains the following files and records in accordance with Commission policy or with federal regulations governing accrediting associations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Official Correspondence to Institutions

All official correspondence signed by the President of the Commission addressed to applicant, candidate, and member institutions informing them of formal Commission action and other correspondence deemed to be important for permanent retention are classified as official correspondence.

Disposition: Maintained permanently.

Institutional Profiles and Important Correspondence

Recent copies of Institutional Profiles are maintained in the Commission office for a one-year period. Institutional profile information is stored in the Commission data base.

Disposition: Information on enrollment and finances collected from the Institutional Profiles is stored in the data base for a minimum of ten years. Print copies of profiles are purged annually upon receipt of the Institutional Profile for the subsequent year and entry into computer. Audits submitted with Institutional Profiles are retained for three years after submission.

Institutional Materials related to Reaffirmation

For each institution, the Commission retains a print copy of the original signed Compliance Certification that includes narrative supporting determination of compliance, the Quality Enhancement Report, the Summary Report, Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, response of the institution to the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, and the Report of the Off-Site Review (if not incorporated into the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee).

Disposition: All copies of the above are maintained in off-site file storage area and recorded in the Commission's data base for such time as to permit the file to contain records of the last two comprehensive reviews. Print copies destroyed after that point; data base files are retained.

Institutional Materials Related to Substantive Change

Institutions notify the Commission before making significant changes in program, location, or program delivery mode in accordance with the Commission's Substantive Change policy. The Commission's response may be

simple acknowledgement, addition of the information to the Commission's files, request for further information and/or a prospectus, notification that the change will be reviewed at the point of the next Reaffirmation, or authorization of a Substantive Change Committee visit. When a Committee is authorized, the Commission retains a copy of the Report of the Substantive Change Committee, the response of the institution to the Report, and the letter of notification informing the institution of Commission action.

Disposition: Institutional letters of notification and the Commission's final responses will be maintained permanently. If a committee visit is authorized, the institution's prospectus or application will be maintained by the Commission staff member assigned to that institution. Once the final action of the Commission has been taken, whether by the Commission President or by the Commission itself, all institutional materials are destroyed except for the original institutional notification letter as specified above, the Committee Report, the institution's response, and the final letter of notification regarding Commission action.

Other Institutional Accreditation Information and Reports

Currently, institutional accreditation information maintained by the Commission includes applications as well as reaffirmation, substantive change, special and other visiting committee reports, follow-up/progress reports (monitoring reports), action letters, official correspondence, fifth-year follow-up reports, and other pertinent information maintained at the discretion of the staff.

Disposition: Information is retained off site for such time as will permit the file to contain records of the last two institutional reviews. Print copies are destroyed after that point; data base files are retained. Other information may be retained at the discretion of the staff, again, taking into account the need to maintain complete and accurate records while reducing whenever possible redundancy and file storage space requirements. All copies of Applications are destroyed after the initial Accreditation Committee report is received and official action is taken by the Commission.

If an institution is removed from candidate or accredited status by the Commission or the institution withdraws its status, all files pertaining to the institution will be purged following final action by the Commission (includes appeals) with the exception of the retention of official correspondence.

Documents related to Appeals and Litigation

Print copies of the administrative record, the institution's brief, the Commission's response brief, and official correspondence related to an appeal will be stored on-site until final resolution of the appeal. Significant documents related to litigation between the Commission and an institution will be maintained on site until the case has been resolved.

Disposition: Upon notification that litigation has been resolved, all print copies of institutional case materials will be moved to off-site storage and maintained for three years. After three years, only official correspondence and significant material related to litigation will be maintained.

Upon a positive final resolution of an institution's appeal, print copies of all case materials will be moved to off-site storage and maintained for three years. After three years, only official correspondence and other pertinent information/documents will be maintained at the discretion of the staff.

Staff Working Files

Maintained in staff liaison offices, these files contain day-by-day working papers pertaining to individual institutions, notes, correspondence, etc.

Disposition: Files are purged by staff immediately upon completion of the Commission action to which it pertains and at the point of staff change. Upon notification that an institution has initiated litigation, no materials regarding this institution will be purged from these files until such action is resolved.

Other Historical Documents relating to the Work of the Commission

Materials include documents deemed by the staff to be important to documenting the history of the Commission and its work.

Disposition: Documents are stored off-site and maintained permanently. Staff judgment as to contents of these files will be informed by the knowledge that, since these files relate to the history of the organization, their contents would likely be legally accessible to its members.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be updated regularly to ensure contemporary compliance with federal laws and regulations and other pertinent legal requirements.

*Approved: Commission on Colleges, December 1994
Revised for the Principles of Accreditation: February 2004
Revised: December 2005, December 2006*