



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

SANCTIONS, DENIAL OF REAFFIRMATION, AND REMOVAL FROM MEMBERSHIP

- Policy -

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires that a member institution be in compliance with *the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* and its Core Requirements, comply with Commission policies and procedures, and provide information requested by the Commission's Board of Trustees in order to maintain membership and accreditation. When an institution fails to comply with these requirements within a maximum two-year monitoring period, the Commission may impose sanctions. Monitoring reports submitted during this period are not sanctions.

If the Commission determines that an institution's progress is insufficient during the two-year monitoring period but not significant enough to impose a sanction, the Commission will advise the institution that if progress or compliance is insufficient at the time of its next formal review by the Commission's Board of Trustees, the institution could be placed on sanction or removed from membership. (Institutions applying for membership with the Commission on Colleges should refer to the Commission policy "Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions" for procedures concerning the denial or removal of candidacy, or the denial of initial membership.)

Failure to make adequate progress toward compliance at any time during the two-year period or failure to comply with the *Principles* at the conclusion of two years may result in Commission action to remove 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. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information to the public, or failing to provide timely information to the Commission may be construed as an indication of the lack of a full commitment to integrity and may result in the imposition of sanctions or removal of accreditation.

Sanctions

An institution found to be out of compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* must correct the deficiencies or face the possibility of being placed on one of two sanctions: Warning or Probation, in order of degree of seriousness. These sanctions are not necessarily sequential, and the Commission may place an institution on either sanction with or without reviewing a visiting committee's report and with or without having previously requested a monitoring report, depending on the seriousness and extent of noncompliance. In certain circumstances, an institution may be removed from membership without having previously been placed on sanction.

During the two-year monitoring period, institutions may be placed on a sanction for six or twelve months, with a monitoring report required at the end of the period of the sanction. Institutional accreditation cannot be reaffirmed while the institution is on sanction. Denial of reaffirmation of accreditation and invocation of sanctions are not appealable actions. Actions invoking sanctions are publicly announced at the annual meeting of the College Delegate Assembly, posted on the Commission's Web page, and published in the *Annual Report of SACS Commission on Colleges*.

The characteristics of these sanctions include the following:

Warning – The less serious of the two sanctions, Warning is usually, but not necessarily, levied in the earlier stages of institutional review and often, but not necessarily, precedes Probation. It cannot, however, succeed Probation. An institution may be placed on Warning or Probation for noncompliance with any of the Core Requirements or significant noncompliance with the Comprehensive Standards. Additionally, an institution may be placed on Warning for failure to make timely and significant progress toward correcting the deficiencies that led to the finding of noncompliance with any of the *Principles of Accreditation*. An institution may also be placed on Warning for failure to comply with Commission policies and procedures, including failure to provide requested information in a timely manner. The maximum total time during one monitoring period that an institution may be on Warning is two years.

Probation – Failure to correct deficiencies or failure to make satisfactory progress toward compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, whether or not the institution is already on Warning, may result in the institution being placed on Probation. An institution may be placed on Probation for the same reasons as discussed above regarding Warning if the Commission’s Board of Trustees deems noncompliance with the *Principles* to be serious enough to merit invoking Probation whether or not the institution is or has been on Warning. Probation is a more serious sanction than Warning and is usually, but not necessarily, invoked as the last step before an institution is removed from membership. Probation may be imposed upon initial institutional review, depending on the judgment of the Board regarding the seriousness of noncompliance or in the case of repeated violations recognized by the Board over a period of time. An institution must be placed on Probation when it is continued in membership for Good Cause beyond the maximum two-year monitoring period (see section on “Good Cause” below). The maximum consecutive time that an institution may be on Probation is two years.

Denial of Reaffirmation of Accreditation with the Imposition of a Sanction

If an institution is judged by the Commission’s Board of Trustees to be out of compliance with a Core Requirement, it will be placed on a sanction. For an institution seeking reaffirmation of accreditation, its reaffirmation will be denied, and it will be placed on a sanction. If an institution is judged to be significantly out of compliance with one or more of the Comprehensive Standards, its reaffirmation of accreditation may be denied. The action of denying reaffirmation of accreditation will be accompanied by the imposition of a sanction. The institution’s accreditation will not be reaffirmed while it is on Warning or Probation, but its accreditation will be continued. Denial of reaffirmation does not affect the decennial review schedule.

Removal from Membership

An institution may be removed from Commission membership at any time, depending on the Board of Trustee’s judgment of the seriousness of noncompliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* or with the Commission’s policies and procedures. Removal from membership, however, usually occurs after persistent or significant noncompliance during a monitoring period or any time an institution is being followed for Good Cause. A serious instance of noncompliance or repeated instances of noncompliance may result in removal of membership without a monitoring period.

An institution must be removed from membership if it has not demonstrated compliance with all the *Principles of Accreditation* within the two-year monitoring period and has not demonstrated Good Cause as to why it should not be dropped from membership. If an institution is continued in membership for Good Cause beyond the two-year monitoring period (and then only on Probation), it may be removed from membership at any time but must be removed from membership if it does not demonstrate compliance within the two years beyond the end of the two-year monitoring period (see “Good Cause” below).

When an institution fails to pay its dues by the designated deadline, the Commission will assume from this action that the institution no longer wants to maintain its membership or candidacy with SACS Commission on Colleges. By that action, the institution withdraws from membership or candidacy. The Commission’s Board of Trustees will take official action on the termination of accreditation.

In accord with 34 CFR Section 602.24 of the Federal Code, notification of SACSCOC Board of Trustees action to withdraw or terminate membership will be accompanied by a request that the institution submit a teach-out plan to the Commission for approval. (See Commission policy "Substantive Change for Member Institutions" for the specific procedures.) This is applicable if (1) the institution fails to appeal the decision of the Commission's Board of Trustees or (2) the institution appeals the Board's decision and the Appeals Committee rules in favor of the Board.

Procedures for Applying Sanctions and for Terminating Membership

Recommendations for Warning, Probation, and removal of membership are made by one of the Committees on Compliance and Reports to the Executive Council of the Commission. The Council forwards recommendations on Warning, Probation, and removal from membership to the Commission's Board of Trustees, which takes final action subject to any rights of appeal which the institution might have as described in Commission policies. Action placing an institution on Warning or Probation is not appealable.

In the cases of Warning, Probation, or loss of membership, both the chief executive officer and the chair of the institution's governing board will be informed in writing. (For public institutions that are part of a state system, the chief executive officer of the system will also receive a copy of the notification sent to the institution.) The Commission will include in its notification to the institution reasons for the imposition of sanction or for loss of membership.

An action to place an institution on Warning or Probation, to deny reaffirmation, or to remove an institution from membership, along with the reasons for the action, will be read during the annual meeting of the College Delegate Assembly, posted on the Commission's Website, and recorded in the *Annual Report of SACS Commission on Colleges*. Actions which are appealable will be accompanied by a statement that Commission action will not take effect until the time period for filing an appeal has expired or until final action has been taken on the appeal. The Commission policy on disclosure is also applicable to these actions.

Definition and Conditions for Good Cause

If an institution has not remedied deficiencies at the conclusion of its two-year maximum monitoring period, the Commission's Board of Trustees must (1) remove the institution from membership, or (2) continue accreditation for "good cause". If accreditation is extended for "good cause," the institution must also be placed on or continued on Probation.

An institution's accreditation can be extended for "good cause" if

1. the institution has demonstrated significant recent accomplishments in addressing non-compliance (e.g., the institution's cumulative operating deficit has been reduced significantly and its enrollment has increased significantly), and
2. the institution has documented that it has the "potential" to remedy all deficiencies within the extended period as defined by the Committee on Compliance and Reports; that is, that the institution provides evidence which makes it reasonable for the Commission to assume it will remedy all deficiencies within the extended time defined by the Committee on Compliance and Reports, and
3. the institution provides assurance to the Commission that it is not aware of any other reasons, other than those identified by the Commission on Colleges, why the institution could not be continued for "good cause."

The Commission's Board of Trustees may extend accreditation for "good cause" for a maximum of one year. At the conclusion of the period, the institution must appear before the Commission's Board of Trustees at a meeting on the record to provide evidence of good cause as to why its period for remedying deficiencies should be extended again for good cause. (Note: If the institution was placed on Probation during its two-year period following initial

action on deficiencies, the institution must provide evidence for good cause if its accreditation is to be continued with the status of Probation.)

In all cases, the institution bears the burden of proof to provide evidence why the Commission should not remove it from membership.

Document History

Approved: Commission on Colleges, June 2003
Revised for the Principles of Accreditation, December 2003
Revised: Board of Trustees, July 2005, June 2011