



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

## **ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANT INSTITUTIONS**

### **Policy Statements**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is a regional accrediting agency which accredits institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin America and other international institutions approved by SACSCOC that award associate, baccalaureate, master's and/or doctoral degrees. SACSCOC accepts applications from institutions which are located in these areas. Applications, including narrative and documents demonstrating compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, must be in English. Audits must be presented in U.S. dollars and all notes in the audits must be in English.

**Note to International Institutions:** SACSCOC will not send committees to institutions located in countries which are under a Level 3, or 4 travel advisory issued by the U.S. Department of State ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)) and thus will not accept applications for accreditation from institutions located in such countries until the travel advisory is lifted.

The accreditation procedures outlined in this document apply to degree-granting institutions of higher education seeking accreditation with SACSCOC. Former SACSCOC-accredited institutions seeking to regain membership must also follow these same procedures.

Entities which are a part of an institution accredited by SACSCOC and which wish to seek separate accreditation should refer to the SACSCOC Policy Statement "Separate Accreditation for Extended Units of a Member Institution" on its website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

The Application for Membership and the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* may be found on the SACSCOC website under Application Information. Communication concerning membership may be addressed to the President of SACSCOC and/or to the staff member assigned to work with pre-applicant and applicant institutions.

The SACSCOC philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education in its region or an international institution on any basis other than failure to comply with the Core Requirements and Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* established by the College Delegate Assembly or failure to comply with the policies and procedures of SACSCOC. The Board of Trustees of SACSCOC uniformly applies the *Principles of Accreditation* to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions.

An institution seeking SACSCOC membership must complete an application documenting its compliance with the following Core Requirements and Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*:

<b>Core Requirements</b>	<b>Standards</b>
1.1 (Integrity)	4.2.c (CEO evaluation/selection)
2.1 (Institutional mission)	4.2.d (Conflict of interest)
3.1 a (Degree-granting authority)	5.4 (Qualified administrative/academic officers)
3.1.b (Coursework for degree)	6.2.a (Faculty qualifications)
3.1.c (Continuous operation)	6.2.b (Program faculty)
4.1 (Governing board characteristics)	7.3 (Administrative effectiveness)
5.1 (Chief executive officer)	8.2.a (Student outcomes: educational programs)
6.1 (Full-time faculty)	8.2.b (Student outcomes: general education)
7.1 (Institutional planning)	8.2.c (Student outcomes: academic and student services)
8.1 (Student achievement)	10.2 (Public information)
9.1 (Program content)	10.5 (Admissions policies and practices)
9.2 (Program length)	10.6 (Distance and correspondence education)
9.3 (General education requirements)	10.7 (Policies for awarding credit)
11.1 (Library and learning/information resources)	11.2 (Library and learning/information staff)
12.1 (Student support services)	11.3 (Library and learning/information access)
13.1 (Financial resources)	12.4 (Student complaints)
13.2 (Financial documents)* (see note below)	13.6 (Federal and state responsibilities)
	13.7 (Physical resources)
	14.1 (Publication of accreditation status)
	14.3 (Comprehensive institutional reviews)
	14.4 (Representation to other agencies)
	14.5 (Policy compliance)

**\*Note: Required Financial Information for Applicant and Candidate Institutions (Core Requirement 13.2)**

**In addition to providing narrative describing its compliance with Core Requirement 13.1, an institution must include with its application the following financial information:**

- (1) separate institutional audits and management letters (audits opinioned on the institution) for its three most recent fiscal years, including the audit for the most recent fiscal year ending prior to the date of the application. Should the end of another fiscal year occur during initial review of the application by SACSCOC staff, that audit must be submitted before review of the application can be completed. In addition, the audit for the most recently completed fiscal year must be provided when seeking authorization by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to receive a Candidacy Committee visit.**
- (2) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board.**
- (3) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt (short and long term debt attached to physical assets) which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year.**

**Further, throughout the remainder of the process the institution must provide a separate audit and management letter for the most recently completed fiscal year ending prior to any committee visit or Board of Trustees review for Candidacy, Candidacy renewal, or initial Membership.**

**All audits must be conducted by independent certified public accountants or an appropriate governmental auditing agency.**

**An applicant or Candidate institution may not show an annual or cumulative operating deficit at any time during the application process or at any time during Candidacy.**

The completed application constitutes a primary source of information used by SACSCOC to determine apparent compliance with the requirements and standards listed above, which are basic expectations of institutions seeking Candidacy, the initial status with SACSCOC. Compliance with these requirements and standards, however, is not sufficient to warrant initial membership. After gaining Candidacy status, institutions must demonstrate both continued compliance with these requirements and standards and compliance with all of the remaining Standards of the Principles of Accreditation.

**Note: An application which fails to provide evidence of degree-granting authority as required by the state or country in which the institution submitting the application is located will not be accepted and the institution will be notified by the President of SACSCOC that the application has been withdrawn from consideration. The institution may submit another application when it can provide appropriate evidence of degree-granting authority.**

After initial review of the application by SACSCOC staff, the process is as follows: the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports makes recommendations concerning an institution's status to the Executive Council of SACSCOC which, in turn, makes its recommendation to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees which takes final action on the institution's status.

An institution may withdraw its application or its status as a Candidate institution at any time prior to a decision of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. If an institution withdraws its application and later decides to again seek membership, it must submit a new application and follow the procedures outlined below as they apply to institutions seeking status with SACSCOC.

An applying institution bears the cost of application fees as well as the direct and indirect costs of visits. See the section of this policy entitled "Fees and Other Expenses for Applicant and Candidate Institutions."

After awarding of initial Membership, an institution must undergo reaffirmation in five years. This reaffirmation process will require completion of a Compliance Certification, development of a Quality Enhancement Plan (Standard 7.2), and both Off-Site and On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviews. Thereafter, the institution is reaffirmed every ten years.

**Note: Substantive Change**

**An applying institution describes itself in its initial application. Therefore, from the date of submission of an application to the date of awarding of Membership, the institution must not undertake a substantive change as defined by the SACSCOC policy, *Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions*. Should the institution find it necessary to initiate a substantive change, that action may have significant impact on the accreditation process as follows:**

**If an institution chooses to implement a substantive change after submitting an application, but prior to gaining authorization to receive a Candidacy Committee visit, the institution may be required to submit a new application which includes the change. If an institution implements a substantive change after it has been authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee visit but prior to the granting of Candidacy, its authorization may be revoked at the discretion of the President of**

**SACSCOC. If an institution implements a substantive change during its Candidacy period, the status of Candidacy may be revoked at the discretion of the President of SACSCOC. Should Candidacy be revoked, the institution may reapply at any time.**

## **Steps in the Process for Achieving Membership with SACSCOC**

### **1. Mandatory Attendance at Workshops for Pre-Applicant Institutions**

Prior to submission of an application for membership, an institution must attend a mandatory two-day Pre-Applicant Workshop and Pre-Applicant Institutional Effectiveness Workshop at the SACSCOC offices in Atlanta, Georgia. Information concerning registering for the workshops may be obtained by visiting the SACSCOC website ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)) under Application Information. Institutions interested in understanding the process in order to determine whether to apply or not may also wish to attend the workshops. The workshops acquaint attendees with the accreditation process and with the Core Requirements and Standards of the Principles of Accreditation.

### **2. Submission of an Application and Initial Review of the Application**

An institution seeking membership must first submit an application describing the characteristics of the institution and documenting its compliance with the above listed Core Requirements and Standards as well as the required financial documents noted above. The application should be submitted to the President of SACSCOC.

### **3. Review of the Application by SACSCOC Staff and Submission of Additional Information by the Institution**

SACSCOC staff members will conduct an initial review of the application within six months of receipt and will provide the institution with a written assessment of the application. If additional information is needed before review can be completed, SACSCOC staff will hold a conference call with representatives of the institution to discuss the application, the requests for additional information, and the timeline for next steps in the process.

The application review process (beginning with receipt of the completed application and ending with authorization of the Candidacy Committee) can, on average, be accomplished within a period of twelve to eighteen months. The maximum period from the time the initial application is received by SACSCOC to the time that the Candidacy Committee is authorized should not exceed 18 months. Should the institution not receive authorization to receive a Candidacy Committee visit within 18 months after submitting its initial application materials, its application may be withdrawn at the discretion of the President of SACSCOC. Should the institution wish to reapply at a future time, it will be required to submit a new application along with the appropriate application fee.

### **4. Authorization of a Candidacy Committee Visit and the Granting of Candidacy Status**

In order to be authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee visit, the institution must demonstrate through narrative and documentation in the application compliance with the above listed Core Requirements and Standards including financial resources requirements noted above in this document.

After review of the application and review of requested additional information submitted by the institution, if SACSCOC staff members determine that the institution appears to have documented compliance with the Core Requirements and Standards listed above, the President of SACSCOC can

authorize the Candidacy Committee visit.

If the institution does not appear to SACSCOC staff to have clearly documented compliance with all of the requirements and standards as required in the application, the institution will be given the option of withdrawing the application or requesting that it be referred to one of the SACSCOC Committees on Compliance and Reports (the standing review committees of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees) seeking authorization of a Candidacy Committee visit.

Upon recommendation of the Committee on Compliance and Reports, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees will either authorize or deny a Candidacy Committee visit. If the Commission determines that the institution is not in compliance with any of the requirements and standards required in the application, authorization of a Candidacy Committee visit will be denied. If a Candidacy Committee visit is denied, the application process ends. The institution may submit another application in the future at its discretion. Denial of a Candidacy Committee visit is not appealable.

If the SACSCOC Board of Trustees determines that the institution has demonstrated in the application apparent compliance with the requirements and standards required in the application, it will authorize a Candidacy Committee visit.

5. The Candidacy Committee Visit, the Granting of Candidacy Status, and Authorization of an Accreditation Committee Visit

If a Candidacy Committee visit is authorized, a SACSCOC staff member is assigned to the institution and he/she will consult with the institution concerning a date for the Candidacy Committee visit. The Candidacy Committee visit and subsequent decision of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees may take a maximum of twelve months after authorization.

The Candidacy Committee will consist of at least five committee members who will verify on site that the institution complies with the Core Requirements and Standards as required in the application. The Committee will write a report describing its findings and this report will be forwarded to the Committee on Compliance and Reports of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a determination of whether to recommend to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees that Candidacy status be awarded to the institution. The institution has a minimum of two weeks after receiving the report of the Candidacy Committee to respond to the Candidacy Committee Report. That response will be forwarded to the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports as well.

The Candidacy Committee Report and the institution's response to the report, should it wish to provide one, will be reviewed by the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports and that Committee will recommend to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees either that the institution be granted Candidacy or that the institution be denied Candidacy.

If the institution is denied Candidacy, the application process ends. The institution may submit another application along with application fees at its discretion. Denial of Candidacy is appealable. If the appeal is denied, the institution may submit another application at its discretion. If the appeal is upheld, the institution will be granted Candidacy status. (See the SACSCOC policy, "The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly" on the SACSCOC website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).)

The awarding of Candidacy status indicates that the institution has demonstrated compliance with the requirements and standards required in the application and that this compliance has been verified by a Candidacy Committee which has visited the institution. If the institution is awarded Candidacy status, it will be authorized to receive an Accreditation Committee visit. It must complete a

Compliance Certification documenting compliance with all remaining Standards with the exception of Standard 7.2 (the institution does not complete a Quality Enhancement Plan until reaffirmation five years after the granting of membership) and documenting continued compliance with the requirements and standards addressed in the application. It must then host the Accreditation Committee visit and, subsequently, if requested, appear before the SACSCOC Board of Trustees seeking Membership or Continued Candidacy.

In order for an institution to maintain Candidacy status, the Accreditation Committee visit and subsequent action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees must occur within two years of the date that the institution was granted Candidacy.

Candidacy is effective on the date that the SACSCOC Board of Trustees takes action to grant Candidacy. An institution may remain in Candidacy status for a maximum of four years with renewal within two years of the date when it was granted Candidacy.

#### 6. The Accreditation Committee Visit and Subsequent Actions

The SACSCOC staff member assigned to the institution will visit the institution to discuss the date and arrangements for the Accreditation Committee visit and to discuss completion of the Compliance Certification. The chair of the Accreditation Committee will make a preliminary visit to the institution, usually approximately two months prior to the visit, to determine the institution's readiness and discuss arrangements for the visit.

After completion of the Compliance Certification, the institution will host the Accreditation Committee visit. This Committee will evaluate the institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and write an Accreditation Committee Report which will be sent to a Committee on Compliance and Reports and to the institution. The chief executive officer of the institution will be invited to review the report and the institution will be invited to prepare a written response to any recommendations made by the Accreditation Committee. The response must be submitted no later than the date requested by staff, and the Accreditation Committee Report, the response by the institution, and the Committee Chair's written review of the institution's response will be submitted for consideration at either the Board's Summer Meeting in June or its Annual Meeting in December. Action on the report of a visiting committee must take place no later than the second Board of Trustees meeting following the committee visit.

The institution may be requested to send representatives from the institution for a meeting on the record with the Committee on Compliance and Reports.

Possible actions following the first Accreditation Committee visit are as follows: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation), Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action), or Grant Continued Candidacy. If an institution is Continued in Candidacy, the possible actions following a second Accreditation Committee visit are: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation) or Deny Membership and Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action). These actions are described below.

#### The Awarding of Membership after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award Membership after review of the Accreditation Committee Report, the institution's response, and the committee chair's review of the response. The awarding of membership occurs if the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its standing committees judge that the institution has documented compliance with the Core Requirements and Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*, and met the Financial Requirements listed above in this document and has

been in operation, i.e., has without interruption enrolled students in degree programs through at least one complete degree program cycle, and has graduated at least one class at the level of the highest degree offered by the institution prior to the action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. When an institution is awarded Membership, there can be no substantial reliance on subsequent corrective actions to bring the institution into compliance.

Membership is retroactive to January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' action to grant initial accreditation.

#### Denial of Membership and Removal from Candidacy after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

After review of the report of the Accreditation Committee, the institution's response to the report, and the review of the response by the chair of the Accreditation Committee, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees may remove an institution from Candidacy if the institution has failed to comply with Core Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation* and/or has failed to provide strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*. Upon removal from Candidacy, the process ends. An institution removed from Candidacy may submit another application at its discretion. Removal from Candidacy is appealable. (See the SACSCOC policy, "The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly" on the SACSCOC website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).) If the decision is upheld by the Appeals Committee, the process ends and the institution may submit another application along with fees at its discretion. If the Appeals Committee's final decision is to reverse the SACSCOC Board's decision to remove the institution from Candidacy, the institution remains in Candidacy status, receives another Accreditation Committee visit, and within two years is again considered for Membership by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

#### The Granting of Continued Candidacy and Subsequent Action after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may grant Continued Candidacy status after review of the Accreditation Committee Report, the institution's response, and the committee chair's review of the response. The granting of Continued Candidacy will occur if the institution has not yet demonstrated compliance with requirements and/or standards such that subsequent substantial documentation of compliance is necessary. The institution must have provided strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the *Principles of Accreditation* and that it will fully comply with the requirements and standards within four years of being granted Candidacy despite findings of non-compliance cited by the Accreditation Committee.

If Continued Candidacy is granted after the first Accreditation Committee visit, a second Accreditation Committee visit will be authorized to visit the institution after which the institution will be placed on the agenda of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its review committees no later than four years after the date the institution was granted Candidacy. In preparation for the second Accreditation Committee visit, the institution will address issues of non-compliance cited by the first Accreditation Committee and will update information in its Compliance Certification.

The second Accreditation Committee report, the institution's response, and the committee chair's review of the response will be sent to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its standing review committees for action. Representatives from the institution will be invited for a meeting on the record. The possible actions following a second Accreditation Committee visit are: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation) or Deny Membership and Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action).

### The Awarding of Membership after the Second Accreditation Committee Visit

If the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, based on recommendation of the Committee on Compliance and Reports and the Executive Council, finds that the institution has documented compliance with the requirements and standards and met all requirements as listed above for membership, it will award Membership. Membership is retroactive to January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' action to grant initial accreditation.

### Denial of Membership and Removal from Candidacy after the Second Accreditation Committee Visit

If the SACSCOC Board of Trustees denies Membership, the institution will be removed from Candidacy and the application and Candidate process ends. The decision is appealable. If the institution appeals and the decision is upheld by the Appeals Committee, the institution may submit another application at any time at its discretion. If the Appeals Committee reverses the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' decision to deny Membership and remove the institution from Candidacy, the institution is awarded Membership status. Membership is retroactive to January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' action to grant initial accreditation.

## **Fees and Other Expenses for Applicant and Candidate Institutions**

Because of staff and SACSCOC involvement with applicant institutions beginning at the time an institution submits an application, the following fees apply:

For national institutions:

- Application Fee \$10,000
- Candidacy Fee \$2,500 (This also applies to units seeking separate accreditation)

For international institutions:

- Application Fee \$15,000
- Candidacy Fee \$2,500

The Application Fee must accompany the application submitted by the institution. It covers costs associated with the application review and consultation with staff. When an institution is authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee visit, it is assessed the Candidacy Fee. This fee covers costs associated with staff involvement in the accreditation process and assembling a Candidacy Committee.

The institution also incurs the following direct visit expenses: travel, meals, and lodging for members of a Candidacy Committee and members of all subsequent Accreditation Committees and the accompanying Commission staff representative; \$200 to the chair of the committee and \$100 to each Committee member for miscellaneous expenses incurred during the visit; and clerical expenses necessary for the chairs of committees to complete reports. The total cost of visits is billed to the institution by SACSCOC following the visit.

In addition, candidate and member institutions are assessed annual dues using a formula based on enrollment and on educational and general expenditures beginning with the term in which candidate or membership status is awarded. (See the SACSCOC policy, "[Dues, Fees, and Expenses](#).")

**Document History**

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