



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

## THIRD-PARTY COMMENT BY THE PUBLIC

### - Policy Statement -

#### Statement of Purpose

The Commission on Colleges recognizes the value of information provided by students, employees, and others in determining whether an institution's performance at the time of formal committee evaluation for initial candidacy, initial accreditation, or continued accreditation (reaffirmation) meets all requirements at the time of the committee review. The Commission's interest also is in ensuring that an institution has an appropriate period of time prior to the Commission's review to respond to information submitted by the public. Therefore, the Commission invites the public to submit third-party comments following the procedures outlined below.

#### Procedures for Filing Third-Party Comment

The names of institutions seeking initial candidacy or initial accreditation or those within two years of their next reaffirmation (continued accreditation) will be posted on the Commission's Web page. The posting will include the deadline dates (either January 15 or August 30) for submitting third-party comments. All substantive comments received by the due date will be forwarded to the institution within 10 working days of receipt of the comments. The institution will be invited to prepare a written response to the comments. The third-party comments and any institutional response will be reviewed during the institution's scheduled formal Committee review.

If third-party comments lead to findings of non-compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, the Committee will include formal citations in its report. In accord with Commission policy, the institution will have time and opportunity to respond to any formal findings before the Commission's Board of Trustees takes action on its accreditation status.

#### Format for providing Third-Party Comment

Third-party comments must be in writing and include a clear statement describing the institution's performance in terms of compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation, the ***Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement***. All third-party comments must be signed. The *Principles* can be found on the Commission's Web site at <http://www.sacscoc.org>.

Substantive comments concerning the institution's ability to comply (for applicant and candidate institutions) or to continue to comply (for accredited institutions) **will be accompanied** by appropriate supporting documentation. The Commission does not consider unsupported comments to be substantive, and only substantive comments will be forwarded to the institution for response or included in the report.

Third-party comments should be submitted to the President of SACS Commission on Colleges by the deadline date posted on the Commission's Web page. Any comments submitted after that date will not be considered by the Commission because it will not allow ample time for an institution to prepare a response prior to its formal review by a Committee. An individual claiming an institution's alleged significant non-compliance with the Commission's standards outside these procedures and reporting period should file their comments using the Commission's complaint policy.

Third-party comments submitted by the specified date will be acknowledged by the President of SACS Commission and will include the date of future formal action by the Commission's Board of Trustees. Formal action by the Board takes place in June and December of each year. The Commission on Colleges will not release visiting committee reports to the public (see Commission's "Disclosure of Accrediting Documents and Actions of the Commission on Colleges"). Actions of the Board of Trustees regarding the status of an applicant, candidate, or accredited institution will be posted on the Commission's Web page within five days of formal action by the Board of Trustees.

### **Distinction between Submitting Third-Party Comments and Filing Formal Complaints**

Third-party comments are submitted by the public at the time of an institution's formal, scheduled review for the purpose of informing the Commission regarding the institution's ongoing commitment to compliance with the Commission's standards and policies.

The Commission is also interested in ensuring that member institutions maintain *ongoing* compliance with Commission standards and policies *outside the institution's scheduled formal review* and that member institutions maintain appropriate grievance procedures and standards of procedural fairness that are applied consistently. Therefore, if an individual has evidence of an institution's *significant* non-compliance with Commission standards, policies, or procedures, the individual should use the procedures outlined in the Commission's "Complaint Procedures for the Commission or Its Accredited Institutions." This policy can be found on the Commission's Web page at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

#### **Document History**

*Adopted: Commission on Colleges, December 2006*

*Revised: Executive Council, November 2007*

*Adopted: Commission on Colleges, December 2007*

*Edited: March 2010*