

AGREEMENT

between

**The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges**

and

**The Commission on Accrediting
of the Association of Theological Schools**

for

Conducting Joint Reaffirmation Committee Visits

Purpose

The purpose of this agreement between the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (COAATS) is to establish a formal policy and procedure by which these agencies might conduct joint Reaffirmation Committee visits to free-standing graduate institutions that are accredited by both agencies. (University-related divinity schools or free-standing theological institutions with undergraduate programs may request concurrent visits.) This agreement is made in good faith by both Commissions in the context of their decades-long cooperative relationship with the hope that the agreement will assist their member institutions in conducting accreditation reviews in the most efficient and economical way possible.

General Considerations

Institutions desiring joint visits must request them from both agencies before the reaffirmation process begins and must receive formal advance approval from both agencies. Either agency may deny the request. This policy pertains only to joint Reaffirmation Committee visits, that is, the routine periodic institutional review for reaffirmation of accreditation; it does not address other kinds of reviews or visits.

This policy assumes that institutions requesting joint committee visits will be on the same decennial review schedule for both agencies. The policy also assumes that the SACSCOC process of Off-Site and On-Site Committee reviews will pertain, with Off-Site Committee reviews in the fall and On-Site Committee visits in the spring. Formal accreditation action will be taken according to each agency's policies and procedures. COAATS and SACSCOC staff will cooperate in establishing reasonable time lines for appointing committee chairs and evaluators well in advance of the commencement of the reaffirmation process.

Institutions requesting joint committee visits must in their request to both agencies explicitly grant permission to both agencies to share any and all information pertinent to the accreditation process with the other agency, including, but not limited to, committee reports, institutional documents, follow-up or monitoring reports, fifth-year reports, action letters, and previous accreditation history. All institutional materials prepared for the Reaffirmation review will be sent to both agencies.

Institutions participating in the Joint Reaffirmation process will submit modified self-study documents that follow the appropriate guidelines developed jointly and mutually agreed upon by COAATS and SACSCOC staff. The self-study will – at minimum – include documents that address the institution's compliance with both SACSCOC and COAATS accreditation standards, provide the aspirational and qualitative reflection central to the philosophy and standards of COAATS, and set forth the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan.

Staffing

This policy is predicated on a cooperative, collegial, and collaborative relationship between the COAATS and SACSCOC staffs. In order to provide for the continuity and effectiveness of the process, both the COAATS Executive Director and the SACSCOC President will make every effort to limit the number of staff members assigned to institutions undergoing a joint visit. The SACSCOC and COAATS staff members will coordinate all activities regarding the Reaffirmation process including committee visit dates, appointment of the visiting committee chair, composition of the committees, and logistical planning for the visit.

Off-Site Review

COAATS and SACSCOC staff will collaborate to develop a self-study template and guidelines that will enable institutions to demonstrate the extent of their compliance with both SACSCOC and COAATS standards. The institutional self-study/compliance certification and the COAATS aspirational and qualitative reflection will be sent to both agencies. While composition of the Off-Site Review Committee is standard with SACSCOC, COAATS and SACSCOC staff will consult concerning specific committee members in an effort to ensure that the committee is able to serve the review needs of both agencies. COAATS will select three of the agreed-upon number of committee members and collaborate with SACSCOC staff members responsible for managing the Off-Site Committee process in the invitation process. Institutions having joint visits will be assigned to the same Off-Site Committee cluster which will be staffed

by one of the designated SACSCOC staff members for joint visits. COAATS staff will attend the Off-Site Committee review, including committee conference calls before the committee meeting. Dates and times of committee conference calls will be negotiated among the Committee Chair and agency staff members from both agencies prior to announcing dates and times to committee members.

SACSCOC will send a copy of the Off-Site Committee report to COAATS. The institution will send a copy of its Focused Report to COAATS at the same time it is sent to SACSCOC and the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

On-Site Review

SACSCOC and COAATS staff will collaborate on committee composition and membership. Educational program committee members will be theological educators or have that background. If a finance committee member is necessary, that person will need to understand financial particularities and norms usually associated with theological institutions and/or small, private, free-standing institutions. Also, the chief executive officer on the committee will need to understand theological institutions. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will operate as a joint committee. As such, the committee will be responsible for reaching consensus on the content of reports to both agencies. Both COAATS and SACSCOC staff may accompany the visiting committee and serve as resources to the committee regarding the requirements of the agencies.

The COAATS and SACSCOC staff will collaborate on the selection of committee chairs. In addition, COAATS staff will select at least three committee members, including a vice chair, as well as committee members in certain fields from peer institutions. If possible, at least two of these reviewers will be from outside the SACSCOC region. Staff from both agencies will ensure appropriate training/orientation for all evaluators, especially visiting committee chairs.

All protocols specific to both agencies will be honored during the visit. The visit schedule will be negotiated among COAATS and SACSCOC staff, the committee chair, and the institution. Care will be taken to meet the needs of both agencies during the visit both in terms of compliance issues and qualitative issues as well as conscientious attention to evaluating the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan.

The Reports of the Reaffirmation Committee will be organized to meet the needs of both agencies. Particular formatting including "Recommendations" and "Notations" will be worked out by COAATS and SACSCOC staff. A separate COAATS report will be organized according to COAATS standards and will be compiled and edited by the vice chair. A copy of the reports will be sent to both agencies by the committee chair and the vice chair. The institution will send its response to the Reaffirmation Committee Reports to both agencies. After review and action by each Commission, each Commission will send a copy of its action letter to the other Commission at the same time the letter is sent to the institution.

The institution will send all subsequent reports requested by either agency, including follow-up or monitoring reports and fifth-year reports, to both agencies. All subsequent action letters will be sent by each agency to the institution and to the other agency.

Committee Expenses

Both Off- and On-Site Committee members will submit travel expense claims to SACSCOC and will be reimbursed by SACSCOC, which will then send a bill for total expenses to the institution. SACSCOC reimbursement policies will be followed, and the SACSCOC expense form will be used. COAATS staff will be reimbursed by COAATS according to COAATS policies.

Implementation

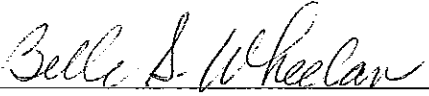
This agreement will be operative upon completion of necessary approval processes of both agencies. COAATS and SACSCOC staff will collaborate in developing operational guidelines to assist both staffs and the involved institutions in the detailed work of planning and conducting joint visits.

Agency Autonomy

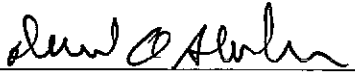
Each agency will retain its own independent decision-making authority regarding the accreditation of institutions evaluated under this agreement according to its own respective standards, policies, and procedures. While it is desirable that the agencies' decisions be as consistent as possible, this agreement recognizes that standards, policies, and procedures peculiar to a particular agency might, at times, preclude such consistency. As required by the U.S. Secretary of Education, each agency will review an institution's accreditation when sanction or other negative action is taken by the other agency.

Review of This Agreement

Both COAATS and SACSCOC retain the right, separately and jointly, to review the effectiveness and continuation of this agreement at any time, to agree to such changes as might appear appropriate, and to terminate this agreement upon appropriate notice.



s/ Belle S. Wheelan
President
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
Date:



s/ Daniel O. Aleshire
Executive Director
The Association of Theological
Schools
Date: