

9/10/07

AGREEMENT

between

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

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 Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is to establish a formal policy and procedure by which these agencies might conduct joint Reaffirmation Committee visits to free-standing institutions that are accredited by both agencies. (University-related divinity schools 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 have 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. It also assumes that the SACS process of Off-Site and On-Site Committee reviews will pertain, with Off-Site Committee reviews in the fall, On-Site Committee visits in the spring, and formal SACS accreditation action taken in December of any given year. ATS and SACS staff will cooperate in establishing reasonable time lines for appointing committee chairs and evaluators well in advance.

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.

ATS will accept the institutional compliance certification and Quality Enhancement Plan required by SACS in lieu of the traditional self-study. The compliance certification completed by the institution will include additional sections addressing ATS standards not included in the SACS standards.

Staffing

This policy is predicated on a cooperative, collegial, collaborative relationship between the ATS and SACS staffs. The ATS Executive Director will appoint one member of the ATS staff to work with SACS staff on joint visits. The SACS Commission on Colleges President will assign no more than two SACS staff members to work with ATS and institutions requesting joint visits. The SACS and ATS 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.

The ATS staff will suggest potential committee chairs and committee members from within the SACS region as well as potential committee members in certain fields from peer institutions outside the region. Staff from both agencies will insure appropriate training/orientation for all evaluators, especially visiting committee chairs. If at all possible, ATS staff will attend the SACS institutional orientation at the beginning of the reaffirmation process and will be given time on the orientation agenda for agency-specific issues.

Off-Site Review

ATS and SACS staff will cooperate in developing a cross-walk between the SACS and ATS accreditation standards so that the institutional compliance certification

addresses both sets of standards with an addendum for ATS-specific standards. The institutional compliance certification will be sent to both agencies. Composition of the Off-Site Review Committee is standard with SACS, but SACS and ATS staff will consult concerning specific committee members who will include at least one theological educator. Institutions having joint visits will be assigned to the same Off-Site Committee cluster which will be staffed by one of the two designed SACS staff members for joint visits. ATS staff may attend the Off-Site Committee review, including committee conference calls before the committee meeting, at the discretion of ATS.

SACS will send a copy of the Off-Site Committee report, including committee judgments regarding ATS-specific standards, to ATS. The institution will send a copy of its Focused Report to ATS at the same time it is sent to SACS.

On-Site Review

SACS and ATS staff will collaborate on committee composition and membership. Typically 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 committee will be known and will operate as a joint committee, not as “ATS appointees” and “SACS appointees.” Both ATS and SACS staff may accompany the visiting committee and serve as resources to the committee regarding the requirements of the agencies.

All protocols specific to both agencies will be honored during the visit. The visit schedule will be negotiated among ATS and SACS 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 as well as conscientious attention to evaluating the institution’s Quality Enhancement Plan.

The SACS Reaffirmation Committee Report format will be augmented with a section covering ATS-specific standards. Particular formatting including “Recommendations” and “Notations” will be worked out by ATS and SACS staff. A copy of the report will be sent to both agencies by the committee chair. The institution will send its response to the Reaffirmation Committee Report 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

Visiting committee members will submit travel expense claims to SACS and will be reimbursed by SACS which will then send a bill for total expenses to the institution. SACS reimbursement policies will be followed, and the SACS expense form will be used. ATS staff will be reimbursed by ATS according to ATS policies.

Implementation

This agreement will be operative upon completion of necessary approval processes of both agencies. ATS and SACS 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 basically in agreement, it is recognized that standards, policies, and procedures peculiar to a particular agency might, at times, preclude such agreement. As required by the 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 ATS and SACS 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
Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges
and Schools

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

Date:

Date: