



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

**Recommended Changes to the 2010 *Principles of Accreditation*  
Submitted October 2011  
For Approval by the Membership  
during the Business Meeting of the College Delegate Assembly  
in December 2011**

**Background Overview**

The "Standing Rules of the College Delegate Assembly" requires that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) undergo a comprehensive review of its standards every seven years to ascertain whether they are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education or training provided by institutions and relevant to the educational needs of students. Those comprehensive reviews took place in 2000-01, resulting in the adoption of the *Principles of Accreditation* that included major changes to the format and substance of our standards and to the review process itself; and in 2006, with another revision to the format as well as substantive changes to the standards and requirements.

The Standing Rules also require that, every three years, the Chair of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees appoints a Standards Review Committee to seek comments from the membership, other constituencies, and the public regarding the *Principles*—soliciting necessary clarifications and currency. Recent reviews took place in 2007 and 2009. In 2010, the Executive Council of SACSCOC Board of Trustees authorized the appointment of a 2011 *Principles* Review Committee.

During its inaugural meeting on March 3, 2011, the Committee considered (1) recent federal regulations that affect accreditation and (2) other issues that had accumulated to date. In early March 2011, the Commission issued a call for comments to its member institutions, its constituents, and the public to review the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (2010 edition)* and provide comment on its currency, needed clarifications, or other issues relevant to its continuing effectiveness. Comments were due March 31, 2011.

On April 13-14, the *Principles* Review Committee convened to consider all suggestions emanating from the call for comment. Following that meeting, a draft of the proposed revisions to the *Principles* was forwarded to the membership and posted on the Commission's Web page seeking additional input. Comments to the draft were reviewed and considered during the Committee's meeting on June 8, 2011. The *Principles* Review Committee considered all recommendations received from the public and from the Commission's member and candidate institutions.

A revised proposal was forwarded to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review and approval during its meeting on June 23, 2011. The proposal is before the membership for final vote during the College Delegate General Assembly's Business Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, December 6, 2011, during the Commission's Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

The proposal is presented below. Proposed new wording is underlined and **shaded**; proposed deletions are crossed out. A brief explanation for each change is described under "Comment."

## Section 2: CORE REQUIREMENTS

**2.8** The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs. **(Faculty)**

**Comment:** *The proposed change makes it clear that there is an expectation to disaggregate the information by academic program rather than providing summative information. The revised Resource Manual will ask institutions to define academic programs and to take into consideration off-campus sites/branch campuses when documenting compliance with this standard.*

**2.10** The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that are intended to promote student learning and enhance the development of its students. **(Student Support Services)**

**Comment:** *This proposed change clarifies that there is no expectation to evaluate the effectiveness of the student services area as part of this requirement. That evaluation is part of CS 3.3.1. The expectation is to ensure that the student support services, programs, and activities are in line with the mission of the institution.*

## Section 3: COMPREHENSIVE STANDARDS

### 3.2 Governance and Administration

**3.2.1** The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and the periodic evaluation of the chief executive officer. **(CEO evaluation/selection)**

**Comment:** *There is no proposed change to this standard; however, a number of institutions requested that "periodic evaluation" be defined. The issue has been referred to the Resource Manual. **NO CHANGE***

**3.2.2** The legal authority and operating control of the institution are clearly defined for the following areas within the institution's governance structure: **(Governing board control)**

**3.2.2.1** institution's mission;

**3.2.2.2** the fiscal stability of the institution; **and**

**3.2.2.3** institutional policy. ~~including policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services;~~

~~**3.2.2.4** related foundations (athletic, research, etc.) and other corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution and/or its programs.~~

**Comment:** *There has been some confusion regarding the meaning of "related and affiliated corporate entities," "related foundations and other corporate entities," and "foundations" as the terms are used in CS 3.2.2 and CS 3.2.13.*

(See revised CS 3.2.13 for a modified standard that incorporates CS 3.2.2.4 with the ideas in the original CS 3.2.13.) The intent of the standard is aimed at addressing who is responsible for promulgating policies at the institutional level, ensuring financial stability, and defining the institution's mission. The standard does not limit such policies to fiscal affairs which the singular reference to auxiliaries may imply. Therefore, the Board of Trustees deleted the phrase and referred it to the Resource Manual to explain that consideration of all policies should include those related to any outsourcing and auxiliary services.

**3.2.3** The governing board has a policy addressing conflict of interest for its members. **(Board conflict of interest)**

**Comment:** *The proposed edit clarifies the specific board responsible.*

**3.2.8** The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience and competence, ~~and capacity~~ to lead the institution. **(Qualified administrative/academic officers)**

**Comment:** *The use of the word "qualified" seemed to be redundant with the other descriptors in the standard; however, the Committee retained "experience and competence" and eliminated "capacity" since it is more difficult to evaluate.*

**3.2.9** The institution ~~defines and~~ publishes policies regarding appointment, ~~and~~ employment, and evaluation of all personnel. of faculty and staff. **(Personnel Faculty/staff appointment)**

**Comment:** *The proposed revision eliminates the word "defines" because it appears to be redundant when used with an expectation that a policy be published. The standard adds the requirement that the publication of policies for appointment, employment, as well as evaluation (new) should apply to **all** personnel, in order to ensure that institutions do not limit it to only faculty and staff.*

**3.2.10** The institution periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators. ~~on a periodic basis.~~ **(Administrator evaluations)**

**Comment:** *The proposed revision is an editorial clarification.*

**3.2.12** The institution demonstrates that its chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities. ~~exclusive of institution-related foundations that are independent and separately incorporated.~~ **(Fund-raising activities)**

**Comment:** *The proposed revision clarifies that the CEO is the person responsible for the control of fund-raising activities. The expectation for the control of other types of "entities" is addressed in CS 3.2.13.*

**3.2.13** For any entity organized separately from the institution and formed primarily for the purpose of supporting the institution or its programs: (1) the legal authority and operating control of the institution is clearly defined with respect to that entity; (2) the relationship of that entity to the institution and the extent of any liability arising out of that relationship is clearly described in a formal, written manner; and (3) the institution demonstrates that (a) the chief executive officer controls any fund-raising activities of that entity or (b) the fund-raising activities of that entity are defined in a formal, written manner which assures that those activities further the mission of the institution. Any institution-related foundation not controlled by the institution has a contractual or other formal agreement that (1) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation and (2) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission. **(Institution-related entities)**

**Comment:** *This proposed revised standard combines expectations from CS 3.2.2.4 and the original CS 3.2.13 and substitutes the word "entity" in place of all those referenced in CS 3.2.2.4.*

### 3.3 Institutional Effectiveness

**3.3.1** The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: **(Institutional effectiveness)**

**3.3.1.1** educational programs, to include student learning outcomes

**3.3.1.2** administrative support services

**3.3.1.3** ~~educational~~ academic and student support services

**3.3.1.4** research within its ~~educational~~ mission, if appropriate

**3.3.1.5** community/public service within its ~~educational~~ mission, if appropriate

**Comment:** CS 3.3.1 generated the most suggested changes from responders. (1) The proposed changes are meant to address the definition of “educational support services” by clarifying them to mean “academic and student” support services. (2) There was some confusion about the use of the word “educational” as descriptors in 3.3.1.4 – 3.3.1.5, so the Board of Trustees eliminated it to ensure that the standard meant that an institution was to evaluate its outcomes based upon how it defined its mission. (3) There were a few comments about eliminating CS 3.5.1 (College-level competencies) and incorporating the standard into CS 3.3.1.1 above, but the Board of Trustees felt that doing so would de-emphasize the importance of general education competencies. The Board also suggested that the Resource Manual address the population referred to in 3.3.1.4 and 3.3.1.5.

### 3.4 Educational Programs: For All Educational Programs

~~(Includes all on-campus, off-campus, and distance learning programs)~~

~~(See Commission policy “Distance Education and Correspondence Education.”)~~

**Comment:** The above explanation of scope has been eliminated under CS 3.4 because it appeared to limit an institution’s evaluation of off-campus and distance learning and correspondence programs to that of the standards listed only under Educational Program with no focus on institutional effectiveness, faculty, library, student affairs and services, and financial and physical resources, where appropriate. The requirement to include the evaluation of off-campus and distance and correspondence education during Commission reviews is addressed more fully on page 5 of the Principles, under Application of the Requirements as revised.

**3.4.4** The institution publishes policies ~~has a defined and published policy~~ that include criteria for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, credit by examination, Advanced Placement, and professional certificates that are consistent with its mission and ensure that course work and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution’s own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution’s transcript. ~~(See Commission policy “Collaborative Academic Arrangements” “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”)~~ **Acceptance of academic credit)**

**Comment:** The proposed revision clarifies that the institution must have criteria for evaluating and awarding work or credit recorded on its transcript. It also adds “credit by examination” to the list of credit-bearing activities.

**3.4.5** The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These policies are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution. **(Academic policies)**

**Comment:** The proposed edit clarifies the reference to “these.”

**3.4.7** The institution ensures the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortial relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the *Principles comprehensive requirements*, and *periodically* evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the *mission purpose* of the institution. (See Commission policy “Collaborative Academic Arrangements.”) **(Consortial relationships/contractual agreements)**

**Comment:** *The proposed modification clarifies that, when entering into consortial relationships/contractual agreements, the Commission expects ongoing compliance with all the Principles and requires a periodical evaluation of the agreement. The proposal also replaces “purpose” with “mission” to make the usage of “mission” consistent throughout the Principles.*

### 3.5 Educational Programs: *Undergraduate Programs*

**3.5.1** The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which *students graduates* have attained them. **(College-level General education competencies)**

**Comment:** *As mentioned under CS 3.3.1, there were a few comments recommending the elimination of CS 3.5.1 (College-level competencies) and incorporating it into CS 3.3.1.1 but the Board of Trustees felt that doing so would de-emphasize the importance of general education competencies. The Board substituted the word “students” for “graduates” because it clarifies and frees the institution to be more flexible about when a student can be assessed for general education competencies. The Board also suggested that the Resource Manual address the issue of timing so that readers understand that students can be assessed at any point.*

**3.5.2** At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. (See Commission policy “Collaborative Arrangements.”) ~~In the case of undergraduate degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns at least 25 percent of the credits required for the degree through instruction offered by the participating institutions. (See Commission policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”)~~ **(Institutional credits for an undergraduate degree)**

**Comment:** *The proposed change makes it clear that at least 25 percent of credit hours for a degree must be earned at the institution offering the degree, regardless of the institution’s participation in a consortial arrangement or contractual agreement.*

**3.5.3** The institution ~~defines and~~ publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. **(Undergraduate program requirements)**

**Comment:** *The proposed revision eliminates “defines” because it appears to be redundant when used with an expectation that requirements be published.*

**3.5.4** At least 25 percent of the ~~discipline~~ course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding *an appropriate* terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate—~~in the discipline~~, or the equivalent of the terminal degree. **(Terminal degrees of faculty)**

**Comment:** *The proposed change requires the institution to make its case regarding the adequacy of faculty with terminal degrees teaching courses in each major at the baccalaureate degree level. It eliminates the use of the word “discipline” due to concerns by the membership that the term is too vague.*

### 3.6 Educational Programs:

#### *Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs*

**3.6.3** ~~The majority~~ At least one-third of credits toward a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. ~~In the case of graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns at least one third a majority of credits through instruction offered by the participating institutions. (See Commission policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”)~~ **(Institutional credits for a graduate degree)**

**Comment:** *The current Commission policy “Collaborative Arrangements,” as adopted by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees last year, requires that a student earn at least one third of credits through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. This proposed change in the Principles makes the expectation consistent with the policy and no longer needs to address consortial arrangements as part of the standard.*

### 3.9 Student Affairs and Services

**3.9.2** The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records and maintains ~~special~~ security measures to protect and back up data. **(Student records)**

**Comment:** *The proposed revision eliminates the confusion caused by the use of the word “special” and better describes what is expected by the Commission.*

**3.9.3** ~~The institution employs qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs programs. The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experience in the student affairs area—to accomplish the mission of the institution.~~ **(Qualified staff)**

**Comment:** *The current wording is confusing, does not address qualifications, and inappropriately adds the effectiveness of student affairs programs to this standard. The proposed revised standard clarifies that the standard addresses the qualifications and numbers of student affairs/services personnel and their ability to accomplish the mission of the institution. It makes it clear that the effectiveness of the student affairs programs is not part of this standard; rather, it is part of CS 3.3.1.3.*

### 3.10 Financial Resources

**3.10.2** ~~The institution provides financial profile information on an annual basis and other measures of financial health as requested by the Commission. All information is presented accurately and appropriately and represents the total operation of the institution.~~ **(Submission of financial statements)**

**Comment:** *This standard asks institutions to provide financial information requested by the Commission. It also indicates that the info must be accurate and appropriate in its representation of the institution. The standard is unnecessary because the Commission has a policy that addresses institutional submissions of documents to the Commission and it has a Principle (1.1) that addresses Integrity in reporting. Consequently, the recommendation is to delete this standard.*

### 3.11 Physical Resources

**3.11.2** The institution ~~takes reasonable steps~~ to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community. **(Institutional environment)**

**Comment:** *The Board of Trustees is not proposing to eliminate “takes reasonable steps to” as previously indicated. The deletion of the shaded words would make institutions responsible for outcomes that sometimes are beyond their control. **NO CHANGE***

## Institutional Responsibility for Commission Policies

**3.12.1** The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the Commission’s substantive change policy and, when required, seeks approval prior to the initiation of changes.  
**(Substantive change)**

**Comment:** *The change makes it clear that the reference is to the Commission’s policy and not the institution’s.*

**3.13.1** The institution complies with the policies of the Commission on Colleges. **(Policy compliance)**

**Comment:** *Even though there has been no recommended change to this standard, the revised Compliance Certification will list those Commission policies affected by this standard and will ask the institution to respond to the policies as is applicable.*

## Section: 4 FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

**4.1** The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement consistent with its mission. Criteria may include: enrollment data; retention, graduation, course completion, and job placement rates; state licensing examinations; student portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals. including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.  
**(Student achievement)**

**Comment:** *The proposed changes more closely reflect the revised 2009 Federal requirements regarding the types of criteria that might be used and it also ties the standard to the institution’s mission. The Resource Manual will address the Commission’s obligation that visiting committees review the criteria used to evaluate student achievement.*

**4.2** The institution’s curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the mission purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded. **(Program curriculum)**

**Comment:** *This proposed change is editorial and provides consistency in the use of the term “mission” in lieu of “purpose” throughout the Principles.*

**4.7** The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent Higher Education Act as amended. Amendments. (In reviewing the institution’s compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on documentation forwarded to it by the U.S. Secretary of Education.)  
**(Title IV Program Responsibilities)**

**Comment:** *Elimination of reference to the 1998 Higher Education Act and the insertion to “Act as amended” prevents the standard from being dated.*

**4.8** An institution that offers distance or correspondence education

**4.8.1** demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

4.8.2 has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.

4.8.3 has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.

**Comment:** *The addition of the new standard addresses the U.S. Department of Education's expectation that recognized accrediting commissions need to require its accredited institutions to authenticate that students registering in distance or correspondence education are the same students participating in class or coursework and receiving credit. In accord with DOE policy, the standards also require a procedure protecting the privacy of students enrolled in such programs and also expect an institution to have procedures for notifying students of any additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity.*

**4.9** The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practice in higher education and Commission policy. (**Definition of credit hours**) (See Commission policy "Credit Hours.")

**Comment:** *The addition of the new standard addresses the U.S. Department of Education's expectation that recognized accrediting commissions require an institution to have a policy that outlines how an institution defines and awards credit hours for courses and programs.*

## Other Proposed Changes

Other revisions proposed to the 2010 edition of the *Principles of Accreditation* that are not included as Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, or Federal Requirements are those listed below.

**1. Page 3, bullet 8.** The proposed change adds the phrase "including religious missions" to read as follows. The addition of the phrase addresses a U.S. Department of Education requirement.

Proposed revision:

*"Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission, including a religious mission, within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission."*

**2. Page 5, The Process of Accreditation: Application of the Requirements.** The proposed change revises the first paragraph and emphasizes that the *Principles* apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered, including those offered through distance and correspondence education, off-campus sites, and branch campuses. A definition of each of these terms is included. The expansion of this section supports the reason for deleting the parenthetical statement under Section 3.4 (see page 4).

Proposed revision:

*"The Commission on Colleges bases its accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions and entities on requirements in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement. These requirements apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered. This includes programs offered through distance and correspondence education, off-campus sites, and branch campuses. Consequently, when preparing documents for the Commission demonstrating compliance with the Principles of Accreditation, an institution must include these programs in its "Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews" and address these programs in its analysis and documentation of compliance."*

For purposes of accreditation, the programs above are defined as follows:

**Branch campus** - a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is

- permanent in nature
- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization **and**
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority

**Correspondence education** - a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced.

**Distance education** - a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

**Off-campus Site** – an instructional site that is located geographically apart from the main campus of the institution whereby a student can obtain 50 percent or more of the coursework toward a credential. The site is not independent of the institution's main campus.

The Commission on Colleges applies the requirements of its Principles to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions, regardless of the type of institution: private for-profit, private not-for-profit, or public.

**3. Page 31, third paragraph, CS 3.12: Responsibility for compliance with the Commission's substantive change procedures and policy.** The proposed change modifies the paragraph by prohibiting a member institution in litigation with the Commission from initiating a substantive change.

*Proposed revision:*

"An applicant, candidate, or member institution in litigation with the Commission, may not undergo substantive change."

**4. Page 32, first paragraph under CS 3.14.** The proposed change adds a new second sentence as indicated below and deletes "Note" on page 33. The change is designed to clarify that the reason for contacting the Commission office about a member or candidate institution should be accreditation related.

*Proposed revision:*

"The institution publishes the name of its primary accreditor and its address and phone number in accordance with federal requirements. Institutions should indicate that normal inquiries about the institution, such as admission requirements, financial aid, educational programs, etc., should be addressed directly to the institution and not to the Commission's office. In such a publication or Web site, the institution should indicate that the Commission is to be contacted only if there is evidence that appears to support an institution's significant non-compliance with a requirement or standard. The institution is expected to be accurate in reporting to the public its status with the Commission. In order to meet these requirements, the institution lists the name, address, and telephone number in its catalog or Web site using one of the following statements:"