



MEMORANDUM

TO: SACSCOC Membership

FROM: Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President

DATE: January 23, 2020

SUBJECT: SACSCOC Updates and Information

I am writing to provide an update to you following the SACSCOC Annual Meeting held this past December in Houston, Texas. Well over 4,000 registrants participated in the meeting and, so far, the feedback has been very positive. Handouts from some of the presentations, including my Annual Report to the Membership, can be found on our website (www.sacscoc.org).

- At the business meeting on Tuesday morning, the membership approved the new [Differentiated Review Process](#) Policy Statement that will allow some institutions to apply to use a more streamlined process during their reaffirmation. This process will become effective with the Class of 2023. If your institution is in this Class, you will receive more information from me soon. Additionally, Please see the timeline that will be followed for implementation of the process: [Timelines for Reaffirmation Tracks](#).
- Several new and revised policies were approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. They include:
 - [Interpretation of Core Requirement 8.1 \(Student achievement\)](#). Revised to incorporate new interpretation of the "Note" from the *Resource Manual*; clarifies request that one measure of student success must be graduation rates; clarifies that graduation rates must be reported in the Compliance Certification during the reaffirmation process and in the Fifth-Year Interim Report; and identifies components that must be disaggregated from the graduation rate data.
 - [Military Institutions](#). New policy. Applicable only to military institutions authorized and operated by the federal government. Specifies the exceptions for Core Requirement 4.1 (*Governing board characteristics*) and Core Requirement 13.2 (*Financial documents*), permitting it to have the force of policy; clarifies the financial requirements and aligns with long-standing practice. Aligns with the rationale of the Principles Review Committee.
 - [Complaints Against SACSCOC or its Accredited Institutions](#). Revised policy and procedures to align with Commission practice for destruction of records one (1) year after a Complaint is closed.

- [Accreditation Records Retention, Maintenance and Destruction Policy for SACSCOC](#). Deletes "...and complaints against institutions" from the definition of an 'Accreditation Record' to align with the Complaint Policy, and permitting destruction of records one (1) year after a Complaint is closed.
 - [Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level](#). New Policy. Codifies SACSCOC practice to address level changes to a lower level and requires filing a substantive change prospectus; codifies process for closing all educational programs at a currently approved level; and changes language to permit "electronic" notification.
 - [Ethical Obligations of Evaluators](#). Revised policy to permit original (i.e., "wet") and electronic signatures, attesting to the absence of any conflict of interest; and updates the procedures to permit the above.
 - [The Quality Enhancement Plan](#). Deletes "...or documenting ongoing quality enhancement initiatives which would demonstrate compliance with Standard 7.2 (QEP)." Clarifies the requirement to submit a QEP Impact Report regarding an institution's Quality Enhancement Plan with the Fifth-Year Interim Report.
 - [Documents Submitted for SACSCOC Review](#). Editorial changes to permit electronic submission of documents.
- It has been pointed out to me that the SACSCOC Bylaws specifically PROHIBIT the use of proxies during the College Delegate Assembly Business Meeting at the SACSCOC Annual Meeting. Therefore, going forward, we will be unable to permit presidents to delegate their vote to anyone else. I apologize for not remembering that detail and look forward to our presidents participating themselves in future years.
 - If there are specific topics and/or speakers you'd like us to invite to participate in President's Day Activities, please let me know who and what they are.
 - Effective July 1, 2020, several new changes will take place in the world of accreditation as a result of the Negotiated Rulemaking (Neg-Reg) process that occurred last year. For your information, below I have outlined 20 items that will be reviewed by the Commission for potential changes to various policies and practices of SACSCOC that may need to be made.

One prominent change is that the U.S. Department of Education will no longer refer to "regional" and "national" accreditors separately, but instead will recognize both types as simply "institutional accreditors." However, the final rule makes clear that accreditors may themselves continue to make this distinction. In addition, the regulations require that the "geographic area" of an accreditor include not only those states where it accredits a main campus (as is currently the case), but also any state in which a branch campus or additional location of any such main campus is located. However, the rule also clarifies that an agency whose geographic area includes a state in which only a branch campus or additional location is located is not required to accept an application for accreditation for other institutions in such state.

Other changes include mandatory teach-out plans when an institution is placed on sanction, mandatory publication of transfer of credit policies including the criteria used to determine acceptance of the

credit, and several changes that will impact the Substantive Change Policy. I will keep you apprised of policy and practice changes that the SACSCOC Board of Trustees approves after the June 2020 Board meeting. If you have any questions or suggestions, please let me know.

- On the legislative front, we are still waiting for the full House to take up the College Affordability Act. One of the items in the bill is the establishment of minimum requirements for all institutions regarding student achievement data. This would mean that ALL institutions would have to meet a minimum level of achievement or be in danger of losing their accreditation or, at a minimum, be put on sanction. We are working with the Staff of the House Education Committee to better understand if our current process of each institution having its own goal will meet the bill's requirements. As the bill moves through the House, I'll keep you posted.
- We are still waiting for a full bill from the Senate. As you know, a bill was passed that simplified the FASFA form and provided permanent funding for HBCUs and other minority serving institutions; however, there has not been a bill on Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, *per se*. Again, I'll keep you posted of any movement on that front.
- As promised at the SACSCOC Annual Meeting, our newly revised website is now up and running. Please let me know your thoughts on the ease/difficulty of finding the information you need.

Also, very soon you will receive an email with directions for logging into the SACSCOC Evaluator Portal and updating the personal information we have for you in that portal. We will also be sending instructions on the use of the Institutional Portal. Once you receive these emails, if you have any questions you can direct them to evaluators@sacscoc.org.

- A reminder that when you make changes on your institutional website related to your Student Achievement Data, you need to notify my office that the change has occurred and provide a link to that information. We are responsible for monitoring the information and keeping the U.S. Department of Education apprised of the data.

Additionally, if you have any changes to the location of your program information with the CIP codes listed, you need to notify my office of those changes in the link as well.

While I complete my 15th year as President of SACSCOC, I again thank you for the opportunity to work with you on ensuring the quality of higher education throughout the region. I have truly enjoyed bragging about your successes and look forward to being able to do so in 2020. As always, if I can be of assistance in any way, please feel free to contact me.

Potential Issues Related to Negotiated Rulemaking for SACSCOC

1. Teach out policies for candidacy and reaffirmation
2. Geographic boundaries
 - a. Do we want to accept applications from outside our current region?
3. Peer Evaluator Training
4. Student Achievement
5. Separate standards for faculty teaching dual/concurrent credit are now permitted
 - a. Do we want to allow them?
6. Distance Education
 - a. Authentication of students enrolled and who participate
 - b. Additional charges
7. Mission—don't discriminate against institutions with a religious mission
8. Retroactive approvals to Jan. 1st of each year
9. Innovation
10. Disaster and non-compliance—extensions (need a policy)
11. Proxy's
 - a. Do we want them (not currently allowed in our Bylaws)
12. Growth policy needs to be amended to include the form used to count growth
13. Policy for taking immediate adverse action
14. Teach out policies for adverse action
 - a. Arbitration/mediation
15. Review of SACSCOC standards process
16. Sub Change
 - a. Level change policy needs to be amended
 - b. Look at financial stability for off-campus sites
 - c. No approval after 2 campuses are approved (we currently use 3).
 - d. Visit after 3rd approved site
 - e. Definition of branch campuses
17. Transfer of credit policies
 - a. Publicly disclosed
 - b. Criteria for acceptance identified
18. Appeals process
19. Notification of dates of Board actions
20. Recognition process changes