

SACS Standards for Accreditation

The Commission evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on the following:

- Compliance with the Principle of Integrity (Section 1)
- Compliance with the Core Requirements (Section 2)
- Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards (Section 3)
- Compliance with additional Federal Requirements (Section 4)
- Compliance with the policies of the Commission on Colleges (See Appendix for definition, description, and reference to policies. Access Commission's Webpage: www.sacscoc.org.)

The Principle of Integrity

1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters. (**Integrity**) (Note: This principle is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)

Core Requirements

2.1 The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies. (**Degree-granting authority**)

2.2 The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting members of the board are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.

A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board on which both the presiding officer and a majority of the other members are neither civilian employees of the military nor active/retired military. The board has broad and significant

influence upon the institution's programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting board members are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution. **(Governing board)**

2.3 The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board. (See Commission policy "Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternate Approach.") **(Chief executive officer)**

2.4 The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service. **(Institutional mission)**

2.5 The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. **(Institutional effectiveness)**

2.6 The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs. **(Continuous operation)**

2.7

2.7.1 The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification for all degrees that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit. **(Program length)**

2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. **(Program content)**

2.7.3 In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification if it allows for fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit of general education courses. **(General education)**

2.7.4 The institution provides instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. If the institution does not provide instruction for all such course work and (1) makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia or (2) uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In both cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. (See Commission policy “Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alternate Approach.”) **(Course work for degrees)**

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. Upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets the comprehensive standard for faculty qualifications. **(Faculty)**

2.9 The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. Collections, resources, and services are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs. **(Learning resources and services)**

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)**

2.11

2.11.1 The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. The member institution provides the following financial statements: (1) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a system-wide or statewide audit) and written institutional management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant and/or an appropriate governmental auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (2) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year; and (3) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board. Audit requirements for applicant institutions may be found in the Commission policy “Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions.” **(Financial resources and stability)**

2.11.2 The institution has adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. **(Physical resources)**

2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)** (Note: This requirement is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION, GOVERNANCE, AND EFFECTIVENESS

3.1 Institutional Mission

3.1.1 The mission statement is current and comprehensive, accurately guides the institution’s operations, is periodically reviewed and updated, is approved by the governing board, and is communicated to the institution’s constituencies. **(Mission)**

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)**

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 fiscal stability of the institution; and

3.2.2.3 institutional policy.

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

3.2.4 The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious, or other external bodies and protects the institution from such influence. **(External influence)**

3.2.5 The governing board has a policy whereby members can be dismissed only for appropriate reasons and by a fair process. **(Board dismissal)**

3.2.6 There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy. **(Board/administration distinction)**

3.2.7 The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies.

(Organizational structure)

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

3.2.9 The institution publishes policies regarding appointment, employment, and evaluation of all personnel. **(Personnel appointment)**

3.2.10 The institution periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators.
(Administrative staff evaluations)

3.2.11 The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for, and exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over, the institution's intercollegiate athletics program. **(Control of intercollegiate athletics)**

3.2.12 The institution demonstrates that its chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities. **(Fund-raising activities)**

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. **(Institution-related entities)**

3.2.14 The institution's policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of all intellectual property. These policies apply to students, faculty, and staff. **(Intellectual property rights)**

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 academic and student support services

3.3.1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate

3.3.1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate

3.3.2 The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

(Note: This requirement is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)

PROGRAMS

3.4 All Educational Programs

3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is approved by the faculty and the administration. **(Academic program approval)**

3.4.2 The institution's continuing education, outreach, and service programs are consistent with the institution's mission. **(Continuing education/service programs)**

3.4.3 The institution publishes admissions policies that are consistent with its mission. **(Admissions policies)**

3.4.4 The institution publishes policies 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 "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.") **(Acceptance of academic credit)**

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)**

3.4.6 The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. **(Practices for awarding credit)**

3.4.7 The institution ensures the quality of educational programs and courses offered through consortial relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the Principles, and periodically evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the mission of the institution. (See Commission policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.”) **(Consortial relationships/contractual agreements)**

3.4.8 The institution awards academic credit for course work taken on a noncredit basis only when there is documentation that the noncredit course work is equivalent to a designated credit experience. **(Noncredit to credit)**

3.4.9 The institution provides appropriate academic support services. **(Academic support services)**

3.4.10 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. **(Responsibility for curriculum)**

3.4.11 For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration. **(Academic program coordination)**

3.4.12 The institution’s use of technology enhances student learning and is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs. Students have access to and training in the use of technology. **(Technology use)**

3.5 Undergraduate Educational Programs

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

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 “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.”) **(Institutional credits for a degree)**

3.5.3 The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. (See Commission policy “The Quality and Integrity of Undergraduate Degrees.”) **(Undergraduate program requirements)**

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

3.6 Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs

3.6.1 The institution’s post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, master’s and doctoral degree programs, are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs. **(Postbaccalaureate program rigor)**

3.6.2 The institution structures its graduate curricula (1) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (2) to ensure ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences. **(Graduate curriculum)**

3.6.3 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. (See Commission policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.”) **(Institutional credits for a graduate degree)**

3.6.4 The institution defines and publishes requirements for its graduate and post-baccalaureate professional programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. **(Post-baccalaureate program requirements)**

3.7 Faculty

3.7.1 The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty. (See Commission guidelines “Faculty Credentials.”) **(Faculty competence)**

3.7.2 The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status. **(Faculty evaluation)**

3.7.3 The institution provides ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. **(Faculty development)**

3.7.4 The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom. **(Academic freedom)**

3.7.5 The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters. **(Faculty role in governance)**

3.8 Library and Other Learning Resources

3.8.1 The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. **(Learning/information resources)**

3.8.2 The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. **(Instruction of library use)**

3.8.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution. **(Qualified staff)**

3.9 Student Affairs and Services

3.9.1 The institution publishes a clear and appropriate statement of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement to the campus community. **(Student rights)**

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

3.9.3 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)**

RESOURCES

3.10 Financial Resources

3.10.1 The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability.

(Financial stability)

3.10.2 The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations.

(Financial aid audits)

3.10.3 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. **(Control of finances)**

3.10.4 The institution maintains financial control over externally funded or sponsored research and programs. **(Control of sponsored research/external funds)**

3.11 Physical Resources

3.11.1 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its physical resources. **(Control of 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)

3.11.3 The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that appropriately serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities. **(Physical facilities)**

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOR COMMISSION POLICIES

3.12 Responsibility for compliance with the Commission’s substantive change procedures and policy. The Commission on Colleges accredits the entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located or however they are delivered. Accreditation, specific to an institution, is based on conditions existing at the time of the most recent evaluation and is not transferable to other institutions or entities. When an accredited institution significantly modifies or expands its scope, changes the nature of its affiliation or its ownership, or merges with another institution, a substantive change review is required. The Commission is responsible for evaluating all substantive changes to assess the impact of the change on the institution’s compliance with defined standards. If an institution fails to follow the Commission’s procedures for notification and approval of substantive changes, its total accreditation may be placed in jeopardy. (See Commission policy “Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions.”) If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation. An applicant, candidate, or member institution in litigation with the Commission may not undergo substantive change.

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)**

3.13 Responsibility for compliance with other Commission policies.

The Commission’s philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education on any ground other than an institution’s failure to meet the requirements of the Principles of Accreditation in the professional judgment of peer reviewers, or failure to comply with the policies of the Commission. (See Commission Web site for all current Commission policies: www.sacscoc.org.)

3.13.1 The institution complies with the policies of the Commission on Colleges. **(Policy compliance)** (Note: In the Compliance Certification, Fifth-Year Interim Report, and prospectus or application for substantive change, the institution will be required to address specific Commission policies.)

3.14 Representation of status with the Commission.

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: (Name of member institution) is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award (name specific degree levels, such as associate, baccalaureate, masters, doctorate). Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of (name of member institution). (Name of candidate institution) is a candidate for accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award (name specific degree levels, such as associate, baccalaureate, masters, doctorate). Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the status of (name of member institution). No statement may be made about the possible future accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, nor may an institution use the logo or seal of the Southern Association in any of its publications or documents.

3.14.1 A member or candidate institution represents its accredited status accurately and publishes the name, address, and telephone number of the Commission in accordance with Commission requirements and federal policy. **(Publication of accreditation status)**

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. **(Student achievement)**

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

4.3 The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. **(Publication of policies)**

4.4 Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs. **(Program length)**

4.5 The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (See Commission policy "Complaint Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.") **(Student complaints)**

4.6 Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. **(Recruitment materials)**

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

4.8 An institution that offers distance or correspondence education documents each of the following: **(Distance and 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.

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

