

*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)*

Talking Points

1. Who are we (SACSCOC)?

- SACS initially formed in 1895 for purposes of improving education in the South. Comprised of a few colleges/universities.
- SACSCOC is now comprised of 800 institutions located in 11 Southern states and several international locations.
- SACSCOC is “recognized” by the US Department of Education to function as the regional accreditor in the Southern region.

2. What we do?

- Accredite degree granting institutions of higher education that can demonstrate compliance with SACSCOC accreditation standards.
- Assure quality and continuous improvement in accredited institutions through the peer review process.
- Participate in the national dialogue on major educational issues.

3. What is accreditation?

- As a process, it requires the institution to conduct an internal analysis in which it measures itself against the accreditation standards; it also requires an external analysis using the peer review process to verify compliance with the standards.
- As a product, it means that the institution has (a) a mission appropriate to higher education, (b) resources, programs, and services to accomplish and sustain its mission, (c) clearly specified program outcomes, including learning outcomes, consistent with its mission and the degrees it offers, (d) indicated the extent to which it is achieving its outcomes, and (e) demonstrated its commitment to integrity.
- Accredited institutions must engage the review process in order to gain initial accreditation, every ten years to reaffirm their accreditation, and whenever a substantive change or special problem occurs.

4. Role of faculty and governing boards in program development, review and approval. [The following accreditation standards have been excerpted from the Principles of Accreditation].

- 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)**
- 3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is approved by the faculty and the administration. **(Academic program approval)**
- 3.4.10 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. **(Responsibility for curriculum)**
- 3.7.5 The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters. **(Faculty role in governance)**

THE FIFTH-YEAR INTERIM REPORT

The Fifth-Year Interim Report was developed to respond to the U.S. Department of Education's requirements (1) that accrediting bodies continuously monitor institutions to ensure compliance and (2) that accrediting bodies have a mechanism for reviewing multiple sites initiated since last reaffirmation.

Components of the Report

- Completion of the Report
 - I. Signature Attesting to Integrity
 - II. Abbreviated Institutional Summary Form
 - III. Abbreviated Compliance Certification
 - IV. Additional Report Requested (as required by COC)
 - V. QEP Impact Report

- Review of off-campus sites initiated since last reaffirmation

Part III: Abbreviated Compliance Certification

Standards Reviewed

1.	CR 2.8	Number of full-time faculty
2.	CR 2.10	Student support services
3.	CS 3.2.8	Qualified administrative and academic officers
4.	CS 3.3.1.1	Institutional effectiveness: educational programs
5.	CS 3.4.3	Admissions policies
6.	CS 3.4.11	Qualified academic coordinators
7.	CS 3.11.3	Physical facilities
8.	FR 4.1	Student achievement
9.	FR 4.2	Program curriculum
10.	FR 4.3	Publication of policies
11.	FR 4.4	Program length
12.	FR 4.5	Student complaints
13.	FR 4.6	Recruitment materials
14.	FR 4.7/CS 3.10.3	Title IV program responsibilities/financial aid audits

- **Evaluators:** Committee to Review Fifth-Year Interim Reports composed of experienced off-site committee reviewers who conduct the review similar to that of the evaluation of the Compliance Certification at the time of reaffirmation. Four committees review approximately 10 institutions. Each of the four committees has five members: Coordinator, IE evaluator, student services evaluator, and two academic program evaluators.
- **Options of the Evaluators:** (1) No referral or (2) Referral to a C & R Committee *
- **Options of C & R following referral at the designated meeting:** (1) No additional report, (2) Request monitoring report which starts the two-year limited monitoring period, (3) Recommend placing the institution on a sanction, with a monitoring report, and w/without a visit to campus.

Part IV: Additional Report

Report addresses issues identified at the completion of the institution's last visiting committee review that require monitoring for verification of continued compliance with a standard. Submission by request of a previous C & R; not applicable to all institutions.

* *C & R Committee refers to a Committee on Compliance & Reports, one of four standing committees of the Board of Trustees that reviews institutional accreditation cases and makes recommendations to the full Board of Trustees.*

- **Evaluators:** C & R Committee composed of elected members of the Board of Trustees.
- **Options of the Evaluators:** (1) No additional report, (2) Request monitoring report which continues the two-year limited monitoring period, (3) Recommend placing the institution on a sanction, with a monitoring report, and w/without a visit to campus.

Part V: QEP Impact Report

The QEP Impact Report asks institutions to address the following as relates to the QEP developed during its previous reaffirmation: (1) the title and a brief description of the institution's QEP as initially presented, (2) a succinct list of the initial goals and intended outcomes of the QEP, (3) a discussion of changes made to the QEP and the reasons from making those changes, and (4) a description of the QEP's direct impact on student learning, including the achievement of goals and outcomes as outlined in item three above, and unanticipated outcomes of the QEP, if any.

- **Evaluators:** Committee to Review Fifth-Year Interim Reports (see composition under Part III above)
- **Options of the Evaluators:**
 - (1) Accept with Comment. The institution has adequately documented the implementation of its Plan regardless of changes needed throughout its delivery, provided adequate documentation of the assessment of the QEP's impact on student learning, and demonstrated sustained support for the project. No additional report required.
 - (2) Refer to C & R for review. The institution did not document the implementation of its Plan, the assessment of the QEP's impact on student learning, and the sustained support for the project. Institution is requested to provide an additional report in 12 months that documents progress in modifying and implementing the QEP. Report is forwarded to C & R for action that can include additional monitoring or negative action.

Review of Off-campus Sites initiated since Last Reaffirmation

An institution is requested to undergo a COC committee visit to previously unvisited off-campus site(s) that were initiated since the institution's last reaffirmation and where students can obtain 50% or more of coursework toward the completion of an educational program. The areas of evaluation as applicable to the off-campus site(s) include: (1) faculty qualifications and access, (2) qualifications of administrative and academic officials leading activities and programs at the site(s), (3) Student services, (4) library/learning resource accessibility and sufficiency, (5) physical facilities supporting the programs, and (6) student learning outcomes compared to similar programs offered on the main campus.

- **Evaluators:** C & R Committee composed of elected members of the Board of Trustees.
- **Options of the Evaluators:** (1) Continue accreditation, no additional report, (2) Continue accreditation with a monitoring report, (3) Recommend placing the institution on a sanction, with a monitoring report, and w/without a visit to campus.

Institutional Preparation for the Completion of the Report

- Continuously update your previous compliance certification.
- Provide narrative that supports compliance and explains the use of the selected documentation.
- Document, document, and document.
- Give examples when appropriate.
- Use tables effectively to support your determination of compliance.
- Respond to the standard referenced not to other standards that are not part of the report.

Presentation of Reports

Reports may be submitted in print form, DVD/CD, or thumb drive. The report *may not* direct evaluators to references on your institution's web page; rather, web page information should be transferred to the DVD/CD or thumb drive. Ensure that your report is user friendly with all info easily accessible to evaluators.

Note: Refer to <http://www.sacscoc.org/FifthYear.asp> for additional information. Effective February 1, 2010, a summary of findings from the reviews of 115 institutions will be posted.

Information for Institutions: Perils and Pitfalls in the Reaffirmation Process¹

Standards most cited for non-compliance by Off-Site Committees

1. CS 3.7.1 (faculty competence)
2. CS 3.5.1 (college-level competencies)
3. CS 3.3.1 (Institutional Effectiveness)
4. CS 3.2.10 (administrative staff evaluations)/CR 2.11.1 (financial resources)
5. CS 3.7.2 (faculty evaluations)

Standards most cited with recommendations by On-Site Committees

1. CR 2.12 (QEP; acceptable with recommendations)
2. CS 3.5.1 (college-level competencies)
3. CS 3.3.1 (Institutional Effectiveness)
4. CS 3.7.1 (faculty competence)
5. CR 2.12 (QEP; deemed unacceptable)

Standards most cited for monitoring reports by C&R

1. CS 3.3.1 (Institutional Effectiveness)/CS 3.5.1 (college-level competencies)
2. CR 2.12 (QEP)
3. CS 3.7.1 (faculty competence)
4. CS 3.5.4 (terminal degrees of faculty)/CS 3.4.1 (program approval)
5. CS 3.8.1 (library/learning resources)/CS 3.10.1 (financial stability)

Further reflections

- It's worth noting that over 70% of institutions received some recommendation on their QEP form the On-Site Committee, but the number being monitored by C&R drops to less than 25%.
- IE remains at the top of the list, with over 33% being monitored by C&R
- Faculty competence at the Off-Site level may be as much a result of a lack of data as unqualified faculty members
- Institutions continue to insist on using the future tense, rather than using the self-study process to find and fix areas of non-compliance
- Institutions also continue to have difficulty providing the documentation in the Compliance Certification and the Focused Report to support their argument for compliance
- Focused Reports sometimes need to be clearer about what new and/or additional information is being added to the institution's initial argument for compliance

¹ Based on Michael Johnson's analysis of the Reaffirmation Classes of 2006 (n=76), 2007 (n=73), and 2008 (n=77). Don't look to the biblical scholar for any sophisticated statistical analysis. I took the "top" ten from each process by Class and assigned an ordinal ranking; then I added up the numbers for all three years. It made for some interesting combinations at times in the resulting list, but (no real surprise) the standards at the top of the list appear to have remarkable staying power.