

***THE PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION:
Foundations for Quality Enhancement***

Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1866 Southern Lane Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097
404-679-4501 404-679-4558 (Fax)
www.sacscoc.org

COMPREHENSIVE STANDARDS

The Comprehensive Standards set forth requirements in the following four areas: (1) institutional mission, governance, and effectiveness; (2) programs; (3) resources; and (4) institutional responsibility for Commission policies. The Comprehensive Standards are more specific to the operations of the institution, represent good practice in higher education, and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions.

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;
 - 3.2.2.3 institutional policy, including policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services; and
 - 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.
- 3.2.3 The 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, competence, and capacity to lead the institution. **(Qualified administrative/academic officers)**
- 3.2.9 The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff. **(Faculty/staff appointment)**
- 3.2.10 The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators on a periodic basis. **(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's chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities exclusive of institution-related foundations that are independent and separately incorporated. **(Fund-raising activities)**
- 3.2.13 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 foundations)**
- 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 educational 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

Programs

3.4 Educational Programs: All Educational Programs (includes all on-campus, off-campus, and distance learning programs and coursework) (See Commission policy “Distance Education.”)

- 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 has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures 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 “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”) (**Acceptance of academic credit**)
- 3.4.5 The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These 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 comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution. (**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 non-credit 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 Educational Programs: Undergraduate Program

- 3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them. **(College-level 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. In the case of undergraduate degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns 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 a degree)**
- 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)**
- 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 the terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate—in the discipline, or the equivalent of the terminal degree. **(Terminal degrees of faculty)**

3.6 Educational Programs: 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. **(Post-baccalaureate 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 The majority 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 postbaccalaureate professional degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortial arrangements, the student earns 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 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 special security measures to protect and back up data. **(Student records)**

- 3.9.3 The institution employs qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs programs. **(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 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)**
- 3.10.3 The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations. **(Financial aid audits)**
- 3.10.4 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. **(Control of finances)**
- 3.10.5 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 or candidate institution may not undergo substantive change prior to action on initial membership.

3.12.1 The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the 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: This standard is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.*)

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. 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 Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools 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 Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools 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 404-679-4501 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**)