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

APPLICATION FOR SACSCOC ACCREDITATION FROM AN INSTITUTION CURRENTLY ACCREDITED BY AN INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITOR RECOGNIZED BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Policy Statement

An institution of higher education accredited by another institutional accreditor recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) may apply for an accelerated pathway to membership with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) under certain conditions.

1. The institution must be accredited (not a candidate) and in good standing (that is, not under any formal sanction at the time of the application) with its current USDE-recognized institutional accreditor. Furthermore, the institution seeking a change of institutional accreditor must remain accredited by and in good standing with its current institutional accreditor until final action to approve SACSCOC accreditation is taken.

2. During the Application for Membership process, the institution may not initiate any changes of a substantive nature without prior approval by the SACSCOC President. If an institution is considering a substantive change during the Application for Membership process, it must notify SACSCOC to verify that the change does not preclude the institution from proceeding with the Application for Membership process. Should the institution initiate a substantive change without prior approval of the SACSCOC President before authorization to receive an Accreditation Committee visit, the institution may be required to submit a new application which includes the change. If an institution implements a substantive change after it has been authorized to receive an Accreditation Committee, its authorization may be revoked at the discretion of the SACSCOC President, and the institution may be required to submit a new application which includes the change prior to Accreditation Committee reauthorization.

3. All management agreements, option agreements, or other contractual agreements with respect to the management and control of the institution, if any, must be in place at the time of submission of the application and included for review in the application.

5. This process applies only to institutions changing accreditation from another USDE-recognized institutional accreditor to SACSCOC.

6. The institution should submit their letter of intent to change their primary institutional accreditor with the United States Department of Education (USDE) but retain their current membership. Once the institution has secured SACSCOC accreditation and an official change of primary institutional accreditor has been approved by USDE, the institution should inform the President of the former accreditor of that official date in a timely manner.

7. There is no provision for candidacy in the process of accreditation for institutions currently accredited by an institutional accreditor recognized by USDE.

8. An institution may withdraw its application at any time prior to a decision of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. If an institution withdraws its application and later decides to again seek membership, it must submit a new application and follow the procedures outlined below as they apply to institutions seeking status with SACSCOC.

9. An applying institution bears the cost of application fees as well as the direct and indirect costs of visits. See the section of this policy entitled "Fees and Expenses."

10. All final decisions regarding the accreditation status of an institution are made by SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Denial of the change of accreditation is an appealable action.

The SACSCOC philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education on any basis other than failure to comply with the relevant standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* established by the College Delegate Assembly or failure to comply with the policies and procedures of SACSCOC. The Board of Trustees of SACSCOC uniformly applies the Principles of Accreditation to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions.

The completed application constitutes a primary source of information used by SACSCOC to determine apparent compliance with the requirements and standards included in the *Application for Membership*, which are basic expectations of institutions seeking authorization of an Accreditation Committee visit with SACSCOC. Compliance with these requirements and standards, however, is not sufficient to warrant initial membership. After an Accreditation Committee is authorized, institutions must demonstrate both continued compliance with these requirements and standards and compliance with all the remaining standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* included in the *Compliance Certification For New Members.*

Note: An application which fails to provide evidence of degree-granting authority as required by the state or country in which the institution submitting the application is located will not be accepted and the institution will be notified by the President of SACSCOC that the application has been withdrawn from consideration. The institution may submit another application when it can provide appropriate evidence of degree-granting authority.

Institutions are required to notify SACSCOC in writing if it does not intend to participate in title IV HEA programs per 34 CFR § 602.16 (b) and affirm that decision under this standard. All subsequent awards of accreditation status will note whether an institution has requested not to include participation in title IV HEA programs in its accreditation. Institutions not participating in title IV HEA programs are not required to document compliance with federal responsibilities, but are required to document compliance with state responsibilities, if applicable. See *Title IV Program Responsibilities*.

Procedures

Steps in the Process for Changing Primary Institutional Accreditor to SACSCOC from another USDE-recognized institutional accreditor

1. The institution notifies SACSCOC and USDE in writing of its intent to change primary institutional accreditors. The notification to SACSCOC (and subsequent application) must include a copy of the notification to USDE along with documentation of authorization by the institution's governing board of the parent entity and the appropriate governmental body (if required) for the unit to change primary institutional accreditor. The President of SACSCOC assigns the SACSCOC staff member responsible for applicant institutions to review the application.

2. Representatives of the institution attend mandatory virtual Pre-Applicant Workshops. Information concerning registering for the workshops may be obtained by visiting the SACSCOC website, www.sacscoc.org. The workshops acquaint attendees with the accreditation process and with the standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

3. The institution may submit an *Application for Membership* after receiving approval for a change in primary institutional accreditor from USDE. The application should include all documentation required to demonstrate compliance with the relevant standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* as approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

4. The *Application for Membership* is reviewed by SACSCOC staff.

5. If SACSCOC staff determine that the institution appears to have presented a sufficient case for compliance with all standards included in the Application for Membership, staff will refer the Application for Membership to the SACSCOC President for action. The President may authorize the institution to complete the *Compliance Certification for New Members* addressing compliance with all standards and authorize an Accreditation Committee to visit the institution or may deny such authorization. If authorization is denied, the institution may request that its Application for Membership be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review.

6. If SACSCOC staff cannot determine whether the institution appears to have presented a sufficient case for compliance with all standards included in the *Application for Membership*, the institution will be offered the option of withdrawing the *Application for Membership* or requesting that it be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action. The Board of Trustees may authorize the institution to complete the *Compliance Certification For New Members* addressing compliance with all standards and authorize an Accreditation Committee to visit the institution, or it may deny such authorization. If authorization is denied, the institution may reapply to list SACSCOC as its primary institutional accreditor any time that it wishes with the approval of USDE.

7. The Accreditation Committee visit must occur within two years of authorization (or after reauthorization if required due to the initiation of substantive changes without prior approval). After that time, Accreditation Committee authorization expires, unless an extension is approved by the SACSCOC President.

8. The institution may not initiate other substantive changes during the time period between submission of the *Compliance Certification For New Members* through final action on SACSCOC accreditation.

9. The institution must include with its application the following financial information:
   a. separate institutional audits and management letters (audits opinioned on the institution) for its three most recent fiscal years, including the audit for the most recent fiscal year ending prior to the date of the application. Should the end of another fiscal year occur during initial review of the application by SACSCOC staff, that audit must be submitted before review of the application can be completed. In addition, the audit for the three (3) most recently completed fiscal year must be provided when seeking authorization by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to receive an Accreditation Committee visit.
   b. an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board.
   c. a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt (short- and long-term debt attached to physical assets) which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year.

   Further, throughout the remainder of the process the institution must provide a separate audit and management letter for the most recently completed fiscal year ending prior to any committee visit or Board of Trustees review for (re)authorization of an Accreditation Committee or initial Membership. All audits must be conducted by independent certified public accountants or an appropriate governmental auditing agency. An applicant institution may not show 1) an annual operating deficit from the time of application to award of initial membership, or 2) a cumulative operating deficit across the years presented as documentation.

10. After authorization of an Accreditation Committee visit, the SACSCOC staff member assigned to the institution will conduct an advisory visit to assist the institution in finalizing its *Compliance Certification for New Members* and discuss arrangements for the Accreditation Committee visit.

11. The chief executive officer of the institution will be invited to review the report, and the institution will be invited to prepare a written response to any recommendations made by the Accreditation Committee. The response must be submitted no later than the date requested by staff.

12. After the Accreditation Committee visit, the report of the Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to that report are forwarded to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action.

13. At the discretion of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the Board may schedule the institution to appear before a Committee on Compliance and Reports of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a meeting on the record to provide evidence to further inform the decision of the Board regarding the institution,

14. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award Membership after review of the Accreditation Committee Report, the institution's response, and the committee chair's review of the response. The awarding of membership occurs if the SACSCOC Board of Trustees judge that the institution has: 1) documented compliance with the standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*, 2) met the financial requirements listed above in this document, and 3) been in operation, i.e., has without interruption enrolled students in degree programs through at least one complete degree program cycle prior to the action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

15. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award accreditation, continue the institution as an Applicant and authorize a second accreditation committee, or deny accreditation.

16. If the SACSCOC Board awards accreditation, the newly-accredited institution will be required to submit a *Fifth-Year Interim Report* (without QEP Impact Report) five years after award of membership and have its accreditation reaffirmed ten years after the granting of membership (and every ten years thereafter). For reaffirmation of accreditation, the institution must document compliance with all standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award accreditation with a Monitoring Report, at its discretion, if the Board determines that the institution is non-compliant with a standard that it determines has the potential to be resolved within six months. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may not award accreditation if the institution is non-compliant with a Core Requirement.

17. If the SACSCOC Board continues the institution as an Applicant and authorizes a second Accreditation Committee, the institution must submit its original *Compliance Certification for New* Members, its original Response Report to the first Accreditation Committee's report, and a new Focused Report addressing the standards identified in the action letter from the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The Accreditation Committee visit must occur within one year of authorization. After that time, Accreditation Committee authorization expires, unless an extension is approved by the SACSCOC President.

18. If the SACSCOC Board denies accreditation of the institution (an appealable action), the institution may reapply to list SACSCOC as its primary institutional accreditor at any time it wishes with the approval of USDE. SACSCOC is required to disclose its actions in accordance with *Disclosure of Accrediting Documents and Actions of SACSCOC*. Such disclosure may result in further review by the institution's primary institutional accreditor. The decision is appealable. (See the SACSCOC policy, *The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly* on the SACSCOC website, www.sacscoc.org.)

19. Once the institution has been awarded accreditation and the official change of primary institutional accreditor has been approved by USDE, the institution should inform the other accreditor of the change. The date of the change of accreditation will be set by the SACSCOC in accordance with USDE requirements. Annual membership dues will be prorated from that date.

20. An institution may withdraw its application at any time during the review process. Upon doing so, SACSCOC will notify the institution's current institutional accreditor.

Fees and Expenses

The institution will be required to pay a pre-applicant workshop fee, an application fee, staff advisory fee, and to assume all expenses incurred by the SACSCOC staff and the Accreditation Committee while conducting the work of the SACSCOC in accordance with the SACSCOC policy, *Dues, Fees, and Expenses*.

Document History
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