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

THIRD-PARTY COMMENT BY THE PUBLIC

Policy Statement

Statement of Purpose

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) recognizes the value of information provided by the public regarding an institution's performance at the time of formal committee evaluation for initial candidacy, initial accreditation, or continued accreditation (reaffirmation) meets all requirements at the time of the committee review. The Commission's interest also is in ensuring that an institution has an appropriate period of time prior to the Commission's review to respond to information submitted by the public. Therefore, the Commission invites the public to submit third-party comments following the procedures outlined below.

For the purpose of this policy, the public is defined as individuals external to the college or university, excluding students. Therefore, this policy will not apply to comments forwarded to the Commission by the current administration, faculty, and staff. The Commission's "Complaint Policy" is the vehicle for comments filed by institutional personnel.

Procedures for Filing Third-Party Comment

The names of institutions seeking initial accreditation or those within two years of their next reaffirmation (continued accreditation) will be posted on the Commission's website. The posting will include the deadline dates (either January 15 or August 30) for submitting third-party comments. All comments received by the due date will be forwarded to the institution. The institution will be invited to prepare a written response to the comments. The third-party comments and any institutional response will be reviewed during the institution's scheduled formal Committee review.

If third-party comments lead to findings of non-compliance with the Principles of Accreditation, the Committee will include formal citations in its report. In accord with Commission policy, the institution will have time and opportunity to respond to any formal findings before the Commission's Board of Trustees takes action on its accreditation status.

Format for Providing Third-Party Comment

Third-party comments must be in writing and include a clear statement describing the institution's performance in terms of compliance with the Commission's standards for accreditation, the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. (Please complete the "Third-Party Comment Form" for all submissions.) All third-party comments must be signed. The *Principles* can be found on the

Commission's website at www.sacscoc.org.

Comments concerning the institution's ability to comply (for candidate institutions) or to continue to comply (for accredited institutions) should be accompanied by appropriate support documentation.

Third-party comments should be submitted to the President of SACSCOC by the deadline date posted on the Commission's website. Any comments submitted after that date will not be considered by the Commission because it will not allow ample time for an institution to prepare a response prior to its formal review by a Committee. An individual claiming an institution's alleged significant non-compliance with the Commission's standards outside these procedures should file their comments using the Commission's complaint policy.

Third-party comments submitted by the specified date will be acknowledged by the SACSCOC President and will include the date of future formal action by the Commission's Board of Trustees. Formal action by the Board takes place in June and December of each year. SACSCOC will not release visiting committee reports to the public (see SACSCOC policy "Disclosure of Accrediting Documents and Actions of the Commission on Colleges"). Actions of the Board of Trustees regarding the status of an applicant, candidate, or accredited institution will be posted on the Commission's website within five days of formal action by the Board of Trustees.

Distinction between Submitting Third-Party Comments and Filing Formal Complaints

Third-party comments are submitted by the public and students at the time of an institution's formal, scheduled review for the purpose of informing the Commission regarding the institution's ongoing commitment to compliance with the Commission's standards and policies.

The Commission is also interested in ensuring that member institutions maintain *ongoing* compliance with Commission standards and policies *outside the institution's scheduled formal review* and that member institutions maintain appropriate grievance procedures and standards of procedural fairness that are applied consistently. Therefore, if institutional personnel or any public individual has evidence of an institution's significant non-compliance with Commission standards, policies, or procedures, the individual should use the procedures outlined in the SACSCOC policy "Complaint Procedures for the Commission or Its Accredited Institutions" (http://www.sacscoc.org/policies.asp).

Document History
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