November 2026

commissioncu.org | LinkedIn

THE TORCH REPORT

NEWS & INSIGHTS FROM THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Written from Scratch. Shaped by Your Peers.

I am pleased to share with you the proposed *Principles of Accreditation*, which will go before the College Delegate Assembly for a vote Dec. 7 at the Annual Meeting.



Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt
Commission President

You may view them **here**.

A year ago, this Commission chose to do something it had not done in a very long time: write its standards from scratch.



The Principles Review Committee at one of its meetings in Atlanta in August 2026.

A Year of Work, Shaped by You

The proposed standards are the product of a year-long process, and they reflect this membership as much as they reflect the committee that drafted them.

In June, we released the first public draft and invited your comments. The response was robust and useful. Every survey comment and every letter was read, and the draft changed in response. In mid-September, we released a second public draft, and once again every comment was read, and further adjustments were made. All of this took place amid negotiated rulemaking and new federal legislation, so the ground kept shifting as the work went on.

The result is 24 standards and seven attestations. Each standard has a lead-in statement explaining why it is included, and the standards are organized into categories that give the whole a clear structure.

With Gratitude to the Principles Review Committee

I want to thank the Principles Review Committee, and the two subcommittees that joined them, for their hard and thoughtful work.

The Committee reflected the full breadth of our membership: public and private, two-year and four-year, comprehensive and research institutions, institutions from every membership state, institutions with distinctive missions, and a public member.

They gave this work a great deal of time, care, and candor, and every institution in our membership is better served because of it.

What is Different

The current standards, built up over many years, too often asked institutions to demonstrate compliance with processes. The proposed standards begin somewhere else entirely.

Rather than opening the Resource Manual, the Committee began with values and guiding questions, and every standard had to pass that test.

Every standard had to enable innovation, honor mission diversity, reduce administrative burden by asking for what matters and nothing more, and preserve the Commission as the gold standard.

***Pruitt**, continued on Page 2*

Commission Names 17 QEP Project of Excellence Award Winners

The Commission on Colleges and Universities announced the 17 member institutions selected to receive the first Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Project of Excellence Awards.

The new awards recognize institutions whose QEPs made a measurable difference in student learning, student success, or both.

More than 50 institutions voluntarily submitted their QEP impact reports for consideration. The QEP Project of Excellence Review Committee, consisting of representatives from member institutions, reviewed the submissions and identified nominees.

The Commission's vice presidents and President Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt reviewed the nominees and approved the winners.

"These 17 institutions set a goal for their students, followed through over several years, and can show the results," Pruitt said.

"That work deserves to be seen, and other institutions can learn from it. We're excited to recognize these institutions for the work they've done to put students first, always."

The QEP has long been a core component of accreditation through SACSCOC, The Commission's accreditation name. As part of reaffirmation, each institution identified a focused, multi-year plan to improve specific student learning outcomes or student success metrics, committed the resources to carry it out, and later reported on what the plan achieved.

The winners include community and technical colleges, public universities, private institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions. Their projects address online learning, the first-year experience, reading, mathematics and quantitative literacy, civic engagement, global learning, undergraduate research, communication, and career planning.

Inaugural QEP Project of Excellence Award Winners

- Alabama State University
- Cisco College
- Dallas International University
- Jefferson Community and Technical College
- Laredo College
- Midlands Technical College
- Mountain Empire Community College
- Panola College
- Piedmont Virginia Community College
- Prairie View A&M University
- Savannah College of Art and Design
- Tennessee State University
- Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi
- Texas Southern University
- Tri-County Community College
- University of Louisiana at Lafayette
- Wade College

Read more: Learn more about the winners and their projects **here**.

***Pruitt**, From Page 1*

And every standard had to answer four questions:

- Does it genuinely promote student achievement?
- Does it advance quality and continuous improvement?
- Does it strengthen transparency and accountability while reducing unnecessary burden?
- Does it keep the focus on outcomes and results rather than process for its own sake?

The Committee also asked two questions that shaped everything beyond the federal requirements:

- What does the Commission need to know to assess an institution fairly?
- And what does the public need to know about the work our institutions do, to restore confidence and trust in higher education?

The result is a sea change. For years, institutions have told us that accreditation can feel like a compliance exercise.

Our answer is not a lighter standard; it is a sharper one.

These Principles are rigorous where rigor serves students, flexible where mission demands it, and built to open doors to innovation rather than close them.

Put simply, they ask us all to move from auditors to quality seekers: from checking boxes to asking whether our institutions are truly serving students well and getting better at it. They ask us to think about quality conceptually, seeking quality through patterns of outcomes, and seeing beyond the simple to embrace the complexity that is higher education.

More than New Standards

I want to be clear that this is not simply a change of standards. It is an opportunity to rethink accreditation itself: how we work together, how we review institutions, and how we demonstrate to the public that accreditation means something.

We will share much more about that at the **Annual Meeting** in December, and I hope you will be there for that conversation.

Thank you for your engagement throughout this process. Your comments made these Principles better, and I look forward to seeing you in December.

Be Bold, Stay Gold.

Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt
President

The Commission | Staff News

Lisa Long Appointed Vice President at The Commission



Lisa Long, J.D.
Vice President

The Commission on Colleges and Universities is pleased to announce the appointment of Lisa Long, J.D., as Vice President, bringing extensive experience in higher education leadership, institutional accreditation, and academic administration to The Commission.

Long most recently served as Chief Operating Officer at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Throughout her career, she has held numerous senior leadership positions at member institutions, including Vice President of Academic Affairs, Provost, Acting President, Chief Transformation Officer, SACSCOC Liaison, Interim Dean, and Chair of the Social Work Department.

"Lisa brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing colleges and universities," said Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt, President of The Commission on Colleges and Universities. "Her experience as an institutional leader, combined with her extensive service in accreditation, will be a tremendous asset to The Commission and the institutions we serve. We are excited to welcome her to our leadership team."

Long recently completed two three-year terms on the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and has served on numerous peer review committees since 2018.

Her experience in institutional governance, academic leadership, and accreditation provides a broad perspective on institutional effectiveness, educational quality, and continuous improvement.

Long earned her Juris Doctor from the Birmingham School of Law, a Master of Social Work from the University of Alabama, and a Bachelor of Social Work from Jacksonville State University.

IN THE ROOM

With Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt

Inside the conversations shaping accreditation

Some of the most important conversations in higher education happen long before a policy is adopted, a resource is published, or an initiative is announced.

The Commission's online blog series **In the Room** opens the door to those conversations.

In this series, Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt shares the ideas, questions, and opportunities currently being explored by The Commission and its member institutions.

Rather than looking back at completed work, In the Room invites readers into the process itself. The series provides context, encourages dialogue, and offers a firsthand look at how ideas evolve into meaningful action in support of institutional quality and student success.

Recent blog topics include:

- **The New Transfer of Credit Requirements:** Examining the Department of Education's new transfer of credit requirements and what they mean for institutions preparing for the July 1, 2027, implementation date.
- **What's Different About Draft #2:** Walking through the updates included in Draft #2 of the rewritten Principles of Accreditation.
- **Rewriting the Principles of Accreditation:** Diving into the discussions, process, and goals of rewriting the Principles of Accreditation.
- **The Case for a Transfer Credit Consortium:** Why now is the right time to rethink transfer of academic credits.

Read In the Room here.



Register for the 2026 Annual Meeting

There's still time to register for The Commission's 2026 Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas. Get more information and register now here.

The Commission's 2026 Annual Meeting:
December 5-8, 2026 | Houston, Texas
George R. Brown Convention Center
Exploring New Frontiers in Accreditation

Welcoming Workforce Initiative Interns at The Commission

This year, The Commission welcomed three new interns in the Communications and Research and Data Analysis departments. The interns are supporting The Commission's work on its Regional Workforce Alignment Initiative.



Naazanin Eftekhar
Georgia State University

Naazanin Eftekhar is a second-year PhD student in Sociology at Georgia State University. She is from Tehran, Iran, and completed her B.Sc. and M.A. in Sociology from Shahid Beheshti University and Alzahra University in Iran. Her research interests include gender and body politics. She currently works as a Research Assistant with the Center for Neighborhoods and Communities at GSU, where she contributes as a news reporter and helps foster dialogue around community and inclusion.



Milton "B.J." Lewis
Clark Atlanta University

Milton "B.J." Lewis is a higher education enrollment leader and PhD student in Education Leadership and Policy at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. B.J. is from Dry Branch, Georgia. He currently serves as Senior Associate Director of Graduate and Online Admissions at Clark Atlanta University, where he supports graduate enrollment strategy, recruitment, and institutional efforts to expand access to higher education. As a doctoral student, his research interests focus on educational access, institutional outcomes, and the transition from higher education into the workforce, particularly for historically underserved students.



Anvi Goyal
Georgia Institute of Technology

Anvi Goyal is a second-year master's student in History and Sociology of Science and Technology at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. Anvi is from Pune, India, and has completed her B.A. in Liberal Arts with a focus on Literature and Anthropology. As a social science researcher, she is interested in looking at ideas of labor migration and race in global tech work in the United States. Her interest in qualitative research and writing helps her reach a wider audience as a communication intern.

Share Your Workforce Story

Is your institution building strong employer partnerships or helping students connect learning to their careers, vocations, or callings?

We want to hear about it.

Your work could be featured in a future Torch Report.

Contact us at communications@commissioncu.org.



Johnston Community College's BILT Program Earns Spotlight

Johnston Community College's (JCC) workforce program came into the spotlight during a recent meeting of The Commission's Workforce Coordinator Network, part of its Regional Workforce Alignment Initiative.

Commission Vice President Dr. Holly French-Hart hosts a monthly series with the Workforce Coordinator Network called Brews and Breakthroughs, which brings together the Network to share information, learn, and spotlight institutions that have implemented successful workforce initiatives.

A recent session highlighted industry partnerships like the BILT model at JCC.

Ryan Bradshaw, the Dean of Business and Digital Technologies at JCC in Smithfield, N.C., presented the successes of the BILT model's implementation at the college. Bradshaw, along with Brian Worley, the Dean of Advanced Technology Programs, leads the BILT model implementation at JCC. This presentation highlighted the model's impact on fostering employer partnerships and securing jobs for graduates.

The Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILT) Model was developed by Dr. Ann Beheler to address the growing need for partnerships between educational institutions and industry leaders. This approach emphasizes sustained collaboration between institutions and employers to ensure that academic programs adapt to workforce demands. The BILT model therefore enables industry and business experts to collaborate and "co-lead" programs.

Learn more about The Commission's Regional Workforce Alignment Initiative, and read the Workforce blog in our online Workforce Hub.