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NEWS RELEASE **Oct. 16, 2015**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Accident Fund's Financial Report Overdue; SC State University, Denmark Tech Continue Timely Reporting Problems

Columbia, S.C. – The State Accident Fund today joins a short list of state entities that remain out of compliance with legally required financial reporting deadlines. The two other entities on the list are S.C. State University and Denmark Technical College whose timely reporting problems continue.

The three agencies have not submitted their audited financial statements for fiscal year 2014-15 to state Controller Richard Eckstrom's office by legal due dates established by the S.C. General Assembly. The fiscal year ended June 30.

The State Accident Fund's deadline was Thursday, Oct. 15. The due date for S.C. State University and Denmark Technical College was Sept. 30. All three failed to meet their deadlines the previous three fiscal years as well.

The South Carolina Medical Malpractice Joint Underwriting Association, after also missing its 2014-15 deadline (Oct. 10), submitted its audited financial statements on Oct. 15.

For S.C. State University, its failure to demonstrate that it exercises appropriate control over its financial resources is one reason recently cited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for maintaining the university's accreditation on probation. Providing timely results of an independent audit of its financial statements as part of a statewide audit is a requirement for demonstrating appropriate financial controls. For more information about this, see the accompanying SACS "Disclosure Statement Regarding the Status of South Carolina State University" (issued June 18, 2015) and its accreditation principles that include core requirement 2.11.1.

Eckstrom says that state agencies create problems when they fail to meet their deadlines because it delays his staff's completion of the statewide comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR), thereby delaying the state's ability to provide essential information on state government's financial condition to the General Assembly, credit rating agencies and other users.

Deadlines for agencies to submit their annual audited financial statements to Eckstrom's office are spelled out in the state's budget passed each year by the General Assembly.

To make delinquent agencies more accountable, Eckstrom has added a page to the Comptroller General's Office website listing agencies that fail to meet their fiscal 2014-15 deadlines and what their deadlines were. The page is viewable at: http://www.cg.sc.gov/Pages/delinquentagencies.aspx.

"We expect management and oversight bodies of all delinquent agencies to increase their commitment to meeting the crucial reporting deadlines mandated by Proviso 117.62 of the 2014-15 Appropriations Act," Eckstrom says. "These reporting deadlines directly impact the timely completion of the state's CAFR. We greatly appreciate the majority of agencies that have provided us their financial statements on time."

For more information please contact Eric Ward, public information director, at 803-734-2538; 803-206-6293 or eward@cg.sc.gov.

End

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
http://www.sacscoc.org

Disclosure Statement Regarding the Status of
SOUTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
Orangeburg, South Carolina
Issued June 18, 2015, by SACS Commission on Colleges

The following publicly available information is provided by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) concerning the accreditation of South Carolina State University. Information presented below is in accord with SACSCOC's disclosure policy; staff of the Commission cannot comment further on questions specifically related to South Carolina State University. The institution has reviewed this statement prior to public posting.

Action by the Board of Trustees of SACS Commission on Colleges took place on June 11, 2015, and the institution's next review is June 2016.

What is the accreditation status of South Carolina State University? South Carolina State University is accredited by SACS Commission on Colleges; however, the institution was continued in accreditation for good cause and continued on Probation for 12 months following submission of the following reports: (1) a Second Monitoring Report stemming from a 2013 special report on finances and governance, (2) a Special Committee Report, and (3) financial statements. Prior to the institution's next review by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees in June 2016, a Special Committee will conduct an on-site evaluation of its compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*—the accreditation standards of the Commission. SACSCOC accreditation includes all components of the institution—all programs, branch campuses, off-campus sites, and distance learning programs as reported to the Commission; thus, the Probation status applies to the entire institution.

What does it mean to be continued in accreditation for good cause and continued on Probation? When an institution has exhausted its two-year monitoring period for complying with SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation*, instead of removing the institution's accreditation, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees can extend accreditation for good cause if (1) the institution has demonstrated significant recent accomplishments in addressing non-compliance, ***and*** (2) the institution has provided evidence which makes it reasonable for the Board to assume it will remedy all deficiencies within a 12-month period, ***and*** (3) the institution has provided assurance to the Board that it is not aware of any other reasons, other than those identified by the Board, why the institution cannot be continued for good cause. An institution must be placed on Probation when it is continued in membership for good cause beyond the maximum two-year monitoring period. The maximum consecutive time that an institution may be on Probation is two years. In June 2016, South Carolina State University will have been on Probation for two years. For additional information about sanctions, refer to SACSCOC's policy entitled "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership" that can be accessed at http://www.sacscoc.org/policies.asp.

Why was South Carolina State University continued in accreditation for good cause and continued on Probation? South Carolina State University was continued in accreditation for good cause and continued on Probation because the SACSCOC Board of Trustees determined that the institution failed to demonstrate compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1 (Financial resources and stability), Comprehensive Standard 3.10.1 (Financial stability and stability), Comprehensive Standard 3.10.3 (Control of finances), Comprehensive Standard 3.10.4 (Control of sponsored research/external funds), and Federal Requirement 4.7 (Title IV program responsibilities) of the *Principles of Accreditation*. The cited standards expect an accredited institution to provide evidence that it (1) has a sound financial base and a demonstrated history of financial stability, (2) exercises appropriate control over all financial resources and sponsored research/external funds, and (3) complies with Title IV program responsibilities. (To read the full statements for standards cited above, access the *Principles of Accreditation* at http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp.)

What will happen in June 2016? The SACSCOC Board of Trustees will consider the accreditation status of South Carolina State University following review of financial statements, a Third Monitoring Report addressing the standards cited above for non-compliance, and the report of the Special Committee that will visit the institution in spring 2016. The Board will have the following options: (1) remove the institution from Probation without an additional report and (2) remove the institution from membership for failure to comply with the *Principles of Accreditation*. Commission staff will not speculate on what decision might be made by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees in June 2016.

For additional information regarding SACSCOC's accreditation process, access the *Principles of Accreditation* (http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp).

The Principles of Accreditation:

Foundations for Quality Enhancement



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Commission on Colleges

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OVERVIEW

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges



MISSION

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. The Commission's mission is the enhancement of educational quality throughout the region and the improvement of the effectiveness of institutions by ensuring that they meet standards established by the higher education community that address the needs of society and students. It serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Latin America, and other international sites approved by the Commission on Colleges that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees. The Commission also accepts applications from other international institutions of higher education.

Accreditation by SACS Commission on Colleges signifies that the institution (1) has a mission appropriate to higher education, (2) has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that mission, and (3) maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that indicate whether it is successful in achieving its stated objectives.

PHILOSOPHY

Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions.

Both a process and a product, accreditation relies on integrity, thoughtful and principled judgment, rigorous application of requirements, and a context of trust. The process provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services. Based upon reasoned judgment, the process stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public.

The product of accreditation is a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements. The statement of an institution's accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges is also an affirmation of an institution's continuing commitment to the Commission's principles and philosophy of accreditation.

The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their resources and capacities and to create an environment in which teaching, public service, research, and learning occur, as appropriate to the mission.

At the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation, the concept of quality enhancement presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and be able to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution's educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document the quality and effectiveness of all its programs and services.

The Commission on Colleges supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; and the right of students to access opportunities for learning and for the open exchange of ideas. However, the exercise of these rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

The Commission on Colleges adheres to the following fundamental characteristics of accreditation:

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.
- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.
- Accreditation is a form of self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.
- Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission, including a religious mission, within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment to the concept of quality enhancement through continuous assessment and improvement.
- Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governing structure designed to promote institutional integrity, autonomy, and flexibility of operation.
- Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSION AND THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is a private, nonprofit, voluntary organization founded in 1895 in Atlanta, Georgia. The Association is comprised of the Commission on Colleges, which accredits higher education degree-granting institutions, and the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement, which accredits elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The Commission and Council, each separately incorporated, carry out their missions with autonomy; they develop their own standards and procedures and govern themselves by a delegate assembly.

The College Delegate Assembly is comprised of one voting representative (the chief executive officer or the officer's designee) from each member institution. Its responsibilities include electing the seventy seven-member Board of Trustees of the SACS Commission on Colleges and guiding the organization's work, approving all revisions in accrediting standards as recommended by the Board, approving the dues of candidate and member institutions as recommended by the Board, electing an Appeals Committee to hear appeals of adverse accreditation decisions, and electing representatives to the Association's Board of Trustees.

The Commission's Board of Trustees is responsible for recommending to the College Delegate Assembly standards for candidacy and membership, authorizing special visits, taking final action on the accreditation status of institutions, nominating to the College Delegate Assembly individuals for election to succeed outgoing members of the Board, electing an Executive Council that will act for the Board while it is not in session, appointing *ad hoc* study committees as needed, and approving the policies and procedures of the Commission on Colleges.

The thirteen-member Executive Council is the executive arm of the Board and functions on behalf of the Commission's Board and the College Delegate Assembly between sessions. However, the actions of the Council are subject to review and approval by the Board. The Council interprets Commission policies and procedures, develops procedures for and supervises the work of *adhoc* and standing committees of the Commission, approves goals and objectives of the Commission, reviews and approves the Commission's budget, oversees and annually evaluates the work of its president, and initiates new programs, projects, and policy proposals.

The Council receives and acts on reports from all *adhoc* and standing committees and submits them to the Commission's Board of Trustees. In the case of institutions applying for candidacy, membership, or reaffirmation of accreditation, the Executive Council receives recommendations from the Committees on Compliance and Reports, which are the standing evaluation committees of the Commission, and, in turn, submits its recommendations to the total Board of Trustees of SACS Commission on Colleges.

THE PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION

The process for initial and continued accreditation involves a collective analysis and judgment by the institution's internal constituencies, an informed review by peers external to the institution, and a reasoned decision by the elected members of the Commission on Colleges Board of Trustees. Accredited institutions periodically conduct internal reviews involving their administrative officers, staffs, faculties, students, trustees, and others appropriate to the process. The internal review allows an institution to consider its effectiveness in achieving its stated mission, its compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements, its efforts in enhancing the quality of student learning and the quality of programs and services offered to its constituencies, and its success in accomplishing its mission. At the culmination of the internal review, peer evaluators representing the Commission apply their professional judgment through a preliminary assessment of the institution; elected Board Members make the final determination of an institution's compliance with the accreditation requirements.

Application of the Requirements

The Commission on Colleges bases its accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions and entities on requirements in the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. These requirements apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered. This includes programs offered through distance and correspondence education, off-campus sites, and branch campuses. Consequently, when preparing documents for the Commission demonstrating compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, an institution must include these programs in its "Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews" and address these programs in its analysis and documentation of compliance. *(See Commission policy "Distance and Correspondence Education.")*

For purposes of accreditation, the programs above are defined as follows:

Branch campus. A branch campus is a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is

- permanent in nature;
- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential;
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; **and**
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Correspondence education. Correspondence education is a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced.

Distance education. Distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

Off-campus Site. An off-campus site is an instructional site that is located geographically apart from the main campus of the institution whereby a student can obtain 50 percent or more of the coursework toward a credential. The site is not independent of the institution's main campus.

The Commission on Colleges applies the requirements of its *Principles* to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions, regardless of the type of institution: private for-profit, private not-for-profit, or public.

The Commission evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on the following:

- Compliance with the Principle of Integrity (Section 1)
- Compliance with the Core Requirements (Section 2)
- Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards (Section 3)
- Compliance with additional Federal Requirements (Section 4)
- Compliance with the policies of the Commission on Colleges (See *Appendix for definition, description, and reference to policies. Access Commission's Web page: www.sacscoc.org.)*

Components of the Review Process

The Commission conducts several types of institutional reviews: (1) Candidate Committee reviews of institutions seeking candidacy, (2) Accreditation Committee reviews of candidate institutions seeking initial membership, (3) Reaffirmation Committee reviews of member institutions seeking continued accreditation following a comprehensive review, (4) Special Committee reviews of member institutions seeking continued accreditation following evaluation of institutional circumstances that are accreditation related, and (5) Substantive Change Committee reviews of member institutions seeking approval and continued accreditation following the review of a change of a significant modification or expansion to the institution's nature and scope. Each of the above types of reviews has its own evaluation documents and peer review procedures and can be found on the Commission's Web site: *www.sacscoc.org* .

The process described below is specific to a member institution seeking reaffirmation of accreditation.

Preparation by the Institution

As part of the reaffirmation process, the institution will provide two separate documents.

1. **Compliance Certification**

   The Compliance Certification, submitted approximately fifteen months in advance of an institution's scheduled reaffirmation, is a document completed by the institution that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements. Signatures by the institution's chief executive officer and accreditation liaison are required to certify compliance. By signing the document, the individuals certify that the process of institutional self-assessment has been thorough, honest, and forthright, and that the information contained in the document is truthful, accurate, and complete.

2. **Quality Enhancement Plan**

   The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted four to six weeks in advance of the on-site review by the Commission, is a document developed by the institution that (1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes

broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. The QEP should be focused and succinct (no more than seventy-five pages of narrative text and no more than twenty-five pages of supporting documentation or charts, graphs, and tables).

Review by the Commission on Colleges

1. The Off-Site Review

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, composed of a chair and normally eight to ten evaluators, meets in Atlanta, Georgia, and reviews Compliance Certifications of a group of institutions to determine whether each institution is in compliance with all Core Requirements (except Core Requirement 2.12), Comprehensive Standards (except Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2), and Federal Requirements. The group of institutions evaluated, called a cluster, consists of no more than three institutions similar in governance and degrees offered. At the conclusion of the review, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee will prepare a separate report for each institution, recording and explaining its decisions regarding compliance. The report is forwarded to the respective institution's On-Site Reaffirmation Committee which makes its final determination on compliance.

2. The On-Site Review

Following review by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, an On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will conduct a focused evaluation at the campus to finalize issues of compliance with the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements; provide consultation regarding the issues addressed in the QEP; and evaluate the acceptability of the QEP. At the conclusion of its visit, the On-Site Committee will finalize the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, a written report of its findings noting areas of non-compliance, including the acceptability of the QEP. The Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, along with the institution's response to areas of non-compliance, will be forwarded to the Commission's Board of Trustees for review and action on reaffirmation.

3. Review by the Commission's Board of Trustees

The Committees on Compliance and Reports (C & R), standing committees of the Board, review reports prepared by evaluation committees and the institutional responses to those reports. A C & R Committee's recommendation regarding an institution's reaffirmation of accreditation is forwarded to the Executive Council for review. The Executive Council recommends action to the full Board of Trustees which makes the final decision on reaffirmation and any monitoring activities that it may require of an institution. The full Board convenes twice a year.

■ **SECTION 1:**

The Principle of Integrity



Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member and candidate institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its accredited and candidate institutions.

Integrity in the accreditation process is best understood in the context of peer review, professional judgment by peers of commonly accepted sound academic practice, and the conscientious application of the *Principles of Accreditation* as mutually agreed upon standards for accreditation. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions and for institutions to make reasonable and responsible decisions consistent with the spirit of integrity in all matters. Therefore, evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information to the public, failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission, or failing to conduct a candid self-assessment of compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and to submit this assessment to the Commission, and other similar practices will be seen as the lack of a full commitment to integrity. The Commission's policy statement "Integrity and Accuracy in Institutional Representation" gives examples of the application of the principle of integrity in accreditation activities. The policy is not all-encompassing nor does it address all possible situations. (See Commission policy "Integrity and Accuracy in Institutional Representation.") Failure of an institution to adhere to the integrity principle may result in a loss of accreditation or candidacy.

1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters. (**Integrity**)
***(Note:** This principle is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)*

SECTION 2:

Core Requirements



Core Requirements are basic, broad-based, foundational requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited with the Commission on Colleges. They establish a threshold of development required of an institution seeking initial or continued accreditation by the Commission and reflect the Commission's basic expectations of candidate and member institutions. Compliance with the Core Requirements is not sufficient to warrant accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Accredited institutions must also demonstrate compliance with the Comprehensive Standards and the Federal Requirements of the *Principles*, and with the policies of the Commission.

An applicant institution seeking candidacy is required to document compliance with Core Requirements 2.1 – 2.11; Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1, 3.5.1, and 3.7.1; and Federal Requirements 4.1 – 4.9 to be authorized a Candidacy Committee or to be awarded candidacy or candidacy renewal. An applicant/candidate institution is not required to document compliance with Core Requirement 2.12 until it undergoes its first review for reaffirmation following initial accreditation. *(See Commission policy "Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions.")*

An accredited institution is required to document compliance with all Core Requirements, including Core Requirement 2.12, before it can be reaffirmed. If an institution fails to document compliance with Core Requirements at the time of reaffiremation or at the time of any review, the Commission will place the institution on sanction or take adverse action. *(See Commission policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership.")*

Core Requirement 2.12 requires an institution to develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community, the QEP is based upon a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment for supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution.

Implicit in every Core Requirement mandating a policy or procedure is the expectation that the policy or procedure is in writing and has been approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

2.1 The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies. **(Degree-granting authority)**

2.2 The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an

active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting members of the board are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.

A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board on which both the presiding officer and a majority of the other members are neither civilian employees of the military nor active/retired military. The board has broad and significant influence upon the institution's programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting board members are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution. (**Governing board**)

2.3 The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board. *(See Commission policy "Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternate Approach.")* (**Chief executive officer**)

2.4 The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service. (**Institutional mission**)

2.5 The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. (**Institutional effectiveness**)

2.6 The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs. (**Continuous operation**)

2.7

2.7.1 The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification for all degrees that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit. **(Program length)**

2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. **(Program content)**

2.7.3 In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification if it allows for fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit of general education courses. **(General education)**

2.7.4 The institution provides instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. If the institution does not provide instruction for all such course work and (1) makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia or (2) uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In both cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. *(See Commission policy "Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alternate Approach.")* **(Course work for degrees)**

2.8 The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs.

Upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets the comprehensive standard for faculty qualifications. (**Faculty**)

2.9 The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. Collections, resources, and services are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs. (**Learning resources and services**)

2.10 The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that are intended to promote student learning and enhance the development of its students. (**Student support services**)

2.11

2.11.1 The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.

The member institution provides the following financial statements: (1) an institutional audit (or Standard Review Report issued in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a systemwide or statewide audit) and written institutional management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant and/or an appropriate governmental auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or Standard Review Report) guide; (2) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year; and (3) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board.

Audit requirements for applicant institutions may be found in the Commission policy "Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions." **(Financial resources and stability)**

2.11.2 The institution has adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. **(Physical resources)**

2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

***(Note:** This requirement is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)*

SECTION 3:

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. If an institution is judged to be significantly out of compliance with one or more of the Comprehensive Standards, the Commission's Board of Trustees may deny reaffirmation and place the institution on a sanction or, in the case of other reviews, place the institution on a sanction. *(See Commission policy "Sanctions, Denial of Reaffirmation, and Removal from Membership.")*

A candidate institution is required to document compliance with Core Requirements 2.1-2.11, all the Comprehensive Standards (except 3.3.2), and Federal Requirements in order to be awarded initial membership.

Implicit in every Comprehensive Standard mandating a policy or procedure is the expectation that the policy or procedure is in writing and has been approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

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; and
3.2.2.3 institutional policy.

3.2.3 The governing 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 and competence to lead the institution. **(Qualified administrative/academic officers)**

3.2.9 The institution publishes policies regarding appointment, employment, and evaluation of all personnel. **(Personnel appointment)**

3.2.10 The institution periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators. **(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 demonstrates that its chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities. **(Fund-raising activities)**

3.2.13 For any entity organized separately from the institution and formed primarily for the purpose of supporting the institution or its programs, (1) the

legal authority and operating control of the institution is clearly defined with respect to that entity; (2) the relationship of that entity to the institution and the extent of any liability arising out of that relationship is clearly described in a formal, written manner; and (3) the institution demonstrates that (a) the chief executive officer controls any fund-raising activities of that entity or (b) the fund-raising activities of that entity are defined in a formal, written manner which assures that those activities further the mission of the institution. **(Institution-related entities)**

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** academic and student support services
- **3.3.1.4** research within its mission, if appropriate
- **3.3.1.5** community/public service within its mission, if appropriate

3.3.2 The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

***(Note:** This requirement is not addressed by the institution in its Compliance Certification.)*

3.4 All Educational Programs

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 publishes policies that include criteria for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, credit by examination, Advanced Placement, and professional certificates that are consistent with its mission and ensure 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 "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.")* **(Acceptance of academic credit)**

3.4.5 The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These policies 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 *Principles*, and periodically evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the mission of the institution. *(See Commission policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.")* **(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 noncredit 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 Undergraduate Educational Programs

3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which students have attained them. (**General education 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. *(See Commission policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.")* (**Institutional credits for a degree**)

3.5.3 The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. *(See Commission policy "The Quality and Integrity of Undergraduate Degrees.")* (**Undergraduate program requirements**)

3.5.4 At least 25 percent of the course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding an appropriate terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate or the equivalent of the terminal degree. (**Terminal degrees of faculty**)

3.6 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 At least one-third of credits toward a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. *(See Commission policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.")* (**Institutional credits for a graduate 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 security measures to protect and back up data. (**Student records**)

3.9.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experience in the student affairs area—to accomplish the mission of the institution. (**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 audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations. **(Financial aid audits)**

3.10.3 The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. **(Control of finances)**

3.10.4 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, candidate, or member institution in litigation with the Commission may not undergo substantive change.

3.12.1 The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the Commission's 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.sac*scoc.org.)

3.13.1 The institution complies with the policies of the Commission on Colleges. **(Policy compliance)**

(***Note:*** *In the Compliance Certification, Fifth-Year Interim Report, and prospectus or application for substantive change, the institution will be required to address specific Commission policies.)*

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. Institutions should indicate that normal inquiries about the institution, such as admission requirements, financial aid, educational programs, etc., should be addressed directly to the institution and not to the Commission's office. 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 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges 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 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges 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 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**)

SECTION 4:

Federal Requirements



The U.S. Secretary of Education recognizes accreditation by SACS Commission on Colleges in establishing the eligibility of higher education institutions to participate in programs authorized under Title IV of the *Higher Education Act,* as amended, and other federal programs. Through its periodic review of institutions of higher education, the Commission assures the public that it is a reliable authority on the quality of education provided by its member institutions.

The federal statute includes mandates that the Commission review an institution in accordance with criteria outlined in the federal regulations developed by the U.S. Department of Education. As part of the review process, institutions are required to document compliance with those criteria and the Commission is obligated to consider such compliance when the institution is reviewed for initial membership or continued accreditation.

Implicit in every Federal Requirement mandating a policy or procedure is the expectation that the policy or procedure is in writing and has been approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

4.1 The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement consistent with its mission. Criteria may include: enrollment data; retention, graduation, course completion, and job placement rates; state licensing examinations; student portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals. (**Student achievement**)

4.2 The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the mission and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded. (**Program curriculum**)

4.3 The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. (**Publication of policies**)

4.4 Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs. (**Program length**)

4.5 The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. *(See Commission policy "Complaint Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.")* (**Student complaints**)

4.6 Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. **(Recruitment materials)**

4.7 The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent *Higher Education* Act as amended. (In reviewing the institution's compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on documentation forwarded to it by the U.S. Department of Education.) **(Title IV program responsibilities)**

4.8 An institution that offers distance or correspondence education documents each of the following: **(Distance and correspondence education)**

4.8.1 demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

4.8.2 has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.

4.8.3 has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.

4.9 The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to Commission policy. *(See Commission policy "Credit Hours.").* **(Definition of credit hours)**

APPENDIX:

Commission Policy, Guidelines, Good Practice Statements, and Position Statements



COMMISSION POLICIES

Definition: A policy is a required course of action to be followed by the Commission on Colleges or its member or candidate institutions. Commission policies may also include procedures, which are likewise a required course of action to be followed by the Commission on Colleges or its member or candidate institutions. The *Principles of Accreditation* requires that an institution comply with the policies and procedures of the Commission. Policies are approved by vote of the Commission's Board of Trustees. At its discretion, the Board may choose to forward a policy to the College Delegate Assembly for approval.

Examples of policy topics include substantive change, standing rules, procedures for applicant institutions, special committee procedures, sanctions and adverse actions, appeals procedures, etc. All policies are available on the Commission's Web page *(www.sacscoc.org)*. The Commission maintains currency on the Web and reserves the right to add, modify, or delete any of the policies listed.

COMMISSION GUIDELINES

Definition: A guideline is an advisory statement designed to assist institutions in fulfilling accreditation requirements. As such, guidelines describe recommended educational practices for documenting requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation* and are approved by the Executive Council. The guidelines are examples of commonly accepted practices that constitute compliance with the standard. Depending upon the nature and mission of the institution, however, other approaches may be more appropriate and also provide evidence of compliance.

Examples of guideline topics include advertising, student recruitment, contractual relationships, travel and committee visits, faculty credentials, etc. All guidelines are available on the Commission's Web page *(www.sacscoc.org)*. The Commission maintains currency on the Web and reserves the right to add, modify, or delete any of the guidelines listed.

COMMISSION GOOD PRACTICES

Definition: Good practices are commonly-accepted practices within the higher education community which enhance institutional quality. Good practices may be formulated by outside agencies and organizations and endorsed by the Executive

Council or the Commission's Board of Trustees. Good practice documents are available on the Commission's Web page *(www.sacscoc.org)*. The Commission maintains currency on the Web and reserves the right to add, modify, or delete any of those listed.

COMMISSION POSITION STATEMENTS

Definition: A position statement examines an issue facing the Commission's membership, describes appropriate approaches, and states the Commission's stance on the issue. It is endorsed by the Executive Council or the Commission's Board of Trustees. Position statements are available on the Commission's Web page *(www.sacscoc.org)*. The Commission maintains currency on the Web and reserves the right to add, modify, or delete any of those listed.