

## SACS-COC

### October 24, 2014 Notices/Updates

1. At its meeting in June 2014, the Board approved an interpretation to Core Requirement 2.7.1 (Program Length). This interpretation expected institutions with combination programs with degrees conferred by the same institution to meet or exceed the credit hour thresholds in the standard for the degrees awarded. Because of the number of questions regarding reporting expectations and the apparent ambiguity in what constitutes these combined programs, this interpretation will be forwarded to the SACSCOC Board in December for a more detailed discussion. Meanwhile, our office is not reviewing substantive change notifications resulting from this interpretation and we ask that institutions delay implementation of this interpretation until we are able to provide more clarification and direction.

2. In June, the SACSCOC Board also approved a new policy: "Institutional Obligations for Public Disclosure." This policy outlines in one document an institution's obligations to provide information that is complete, accurate, timely, accessible, clear and sufficient. Among the 6 items listed, Item 4 addresses one of the standards of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requiring that SACSCOC includes in its standards or in a policy the requirement that an institution publishes statements of its goals for student achievement and the success of students in achieving those goals. In the future, our Institutional Profile will ask institutions to record the website where it displays this information to the public.

3. Several of our member institutions have requested approval for initiating a new program and offering a degree or other award in a discipline area in which the SACSCOC-accredited institution offers none of the courses in the discipline areas of the new program. According to proposals, the SACSCOC-accredited institution would accept in transfer all of the credits in the discipline, provide instruction in the general education courses, and then award a degree or certificate in the discipline while not actually offering any of the discipline courses.

When reviewing these proposals, the Board has denied approval for failure to meet the provisions outlined in the SACSCOC policy, "The Quality and Integrity of Undergraduate Degrees," which states, "To maintain the integrity of the undergraduate degree, the degree-granting institution is responsible for the quality of all credits that constitute the degree it grants." If an institution does not itself offer any of the discipline area courses, and employs no faculty qualified in the discipline to coordinate the quality of the program, then the institution has no control over the quality of the transferred discipline courses or of the program itself. Therefore, this structure places an institution out of compliance with at least Core Requirement 2.8 (Faculty) and Comprehensive Standards 3.4.11 (Academic Program Coordination) and 3.4.4 (Acceptance of Academic Credit) of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

In order to have such a program approved, the institution normally would offer some coursework in the discipline area in which the degree or certificate is offered and would employ

faculty qualified in the discipline area who can ensure the integrity in its curriculum, assessment, academic support, and advisement in the program.

At the time of your institution's next SACSCOC review, if you are **currently offering degrees or certificates enlisting this structure**, the institution should be prepared to demonstrate compliance with the standards outlined above as well as with Comprehensive Standard 3.5.3 (Undergraduate Program Requirements) as pertains to an educational credential offered by the institution. If your institution is found to be out of compliance, you would be subject to a sanction.

4. In order to comply with the regulations of the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission developed and initiated the Fifth-Year Interim Report requiring institutions to provide evidence of ongoing compliance with 17 select standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*—all standards that relate directly to the USDOE's criteria. The Fifth-Year Interim Report's Section III is a Compliance Certification that lists these 17 standards. The Compliance Certification for Reaffirmation addresses all the standards. The expectations for both Compliance Certifications are the same: for every standard, an institution is required to demonstrate compliance by providing narrative, building the case, and documenting compliance.