



## REPORT OF THE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE

### Statement Regarding the Report

*The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is responsible for making the final determination on reaffirmation of accreditation based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with SACSCOC Board of Trustees.*

**Name of the Institution:** University of South Carolina - Columbia

**Date of the Review:** March 22 – 25, 2021

**SACSCOC Staff Member:** Dr. Linda Thomas-Glover

**Chair of the Committee:** Dr. Laurie Casteen  
Associate Dean of Students  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

agencies of any change of accreditation status, including the imposition of public sanctions. (See SACSCOC policy “Accrediting Decisions of Other Agencies.”)  
(Representation to other agencies) [Off-Site/On-Site Review]

The institution provided a list of 14 United States Department of Education (USDOE) recognized agencies that accredit the institution’s programs (misabeled as Institutional Accreditation Agencies, when they are Programmatic Accreditation Agencies). The narrative presents the institution’s mission, discussions of the student body and the impact the institution has on its region, and documentation of external program reviews, substantive changes, program self-studies and letters from some of its programmatic accreditors. The institution further states that it is in good standing with its programmatic accreditation agencies and has had no negative actions since its last reaffirmation.

This standard expects the institution to provide documentation that it represents itself identically to all its USDOE recognized accreditors. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee was unable to determine compliance because it could not locate this documentation for all its USDOE recognized accreditors.

The institution may also want to check its entry in the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs. The list of programmatic accreditors in the database does not match the list provided in the narrative.

The institution’s Focused Report documents the amended statement of accreditation as addressed in Standard 14.1 and includes one additional accrediting agency that was omitted from the initial narrative report. The institution provided the new and unified statement of SACSCOC accreditation to each of its accrediting bodies and provided evidence of this documentation in the Focused Report.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee met with the Interim Director of the Office of Academic Programs/Director of Distributed Learning, the Vice Provost and Dean of the Faculty, the Director Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation/SACSCOC Liaison, and the University Registrar and discussed the institutional process for ensuring that each new relevant accrediting agency is added to the institution’s database of accrediting agencies and provided with the institution’s correct SACSCOC accreditation statement. They also discussed a plan for an annual review of this list of agencies to ensure annual compliance.

- 14.5 The institution complies with SACSCOC’s policy statements that pertain to new or additional institutional obligations that may arise that are not part of the standards in the current *Principles of Accreditation*.  
(Policy compliance)  
(Note: For applicable policies, institutions should refer to the SACSCOC website [<http://www.sacscoc.org>])

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Policy, “Reports Submitted for SACSCOC Review,” states that:

**For electronic submissions**, please comply with all steps outlined below:

1. Copy the report and all attachments onto the appropriate number of flash drives, in accordance with the number of requested copies of the report. **Each** flash drive should be

labeled with the name of the institution and the title of the report. All hyperlinks in the narrative document should open documents stored on the flash drive itself. Documents should be bookmarked, indexed, and searchable. Printed documents should not be scanned to create a pdf, since this process will result in a large file that is not searchable.

As noted throughout this report, the institution provides a preponderance of evidence via links that go to websites outside the flash drive; the Commission expects that institutions provide static information for its reaffirmation records. While the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee made every attempt to review the institution's documentation, some documentation could not be reviewed or considered due to the (a) live websites with no instructions or directions for how to find the intended evidence, (b) broken links, (c) low-quality, blurred images that were unreadable, and (d) lack of direct access to the evidence. In addition, the institution often linked to multipage documents as evidence, and expected the Committee to search the documents for the relevant evidence. The institution's software program (Compliance Assist) has the capability of directing reviewers to specific pages within documents, which expedites the reviewer's work. However, this tool does not work when live links are used to access documents.

The expectation is that all documentation is self-contained within the flash drive provided; therefore, all documentation should be static, downloaded and linked *within* the flash drive. The institution should not expect the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to search live websites. PDF documents and embedded figures should be inspected for clarity and readability. In some instances, the institution's narrative refers to abbreviations for documents or services without spelling them out the first time; the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee made every effort to interpret them, but in some instances, it was not possible.

To address the institution's failure to comply with the SACSCOC policy, "Reports Submitted for SACSCOC Review," the institution needs to provide the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee in its Focused Report a complete narrative with appropriate linked documentation in support of the institution's cases for compliance for all United States Department of Education required standards. These standards are: 5.4 (Qualified administrative and academic officers), 6.1 (Full-time faculty), 6.2.b (Program faculty), 6.2.c (Program coordination), 8.1 (Student achievement), 8.2.a (Student outcomes: educational programs), 9.1 (Program content), 9.2 (Program length), 9.3 (General education), 10.2 (Public information), 10.5 (Admissions policies and practices), 10.6 (Distance and correspondence education), 10.7 (Policies for awarding credit), 12.1 (Student support services), 12.4 (Student complaints), 13.6 (Federal and state responsibilities), 13.7 (Physical resources), 14.1 (Publication of accreditation status), 14.3 (Comprehensive institutional reviews), and 14.4 (Representation to other agencies). This is required even if the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee found adequate documentation in support of the institution's case for compliance.

The institution provided in the Focused Report, amended documents including static PDFs, more focused links, and other static documentation to address the difficulty expressed by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee in navigating live links to find specific pieces of information. Blurred or otherwise unreadable documents, broken web links and other related difficulty in finding evidence relevant to the standards and requirements have also been repaired.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee met with the Interim Director of the Office of Academic Programs/Director of Distributed Learning, the Vice Provost and Dean of the Faculty, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation/SACSCOC Liaison, and the University Registrar and discussed the errors that had occurred in communication with the vendor that had led to these errors in documentation in the original narrative. They discussed the current amended process and expectations for future reports, including a close analysis of the materials before submission to SACSCOC in future reports.

#### 14.5.a “Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports”

**Applicable Policy Statement.** If an institution is part of a system or corporate structure, a description of the system operation (or corporate structure) is submitted as part of the Compliance Certification for the decennial review. The description should be designed to help members of the peer review committees understand the mission, governance, and operating procedures of the system and the individual institution’s role within that system.

**Documentation:** The institution should provide a description of the system operation and structure or the corporate structure if this applies.

*(Policy compliance: “Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports”)*

The institution provided documentation of its relationship to the University of South Carolina System structure and operations and its role within the system as defined by University of South Carolina bylaws Article 1 Section 4. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the South Carolina State Code of Law Section 59-101-10, Bylaws Article XII Section 2, the organizational charts for its Columbia campus and the Palmetto College. The Carolina System presidency is governed by the Board of Trustees and avoids conflict of interest between system presidency and Columbia campus presidency by adhering to the policies put in place and enforced by the Board of Trustees.

#### 14.5.b “Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution”

**Applicable Policy Statement.** If the Commission on Colleges determines that an extended unit is autonomous to the extent that the control over that unit by the parent or its board is significantly impaired, the Commission may direct that the extended unit seek to become a separately accredited institution. A unit which seeks separate accreditation should bear a different name from that of the parent. A unit which is located in a state or country outside the geographic jurisdiction of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and which the Commission determines should be separately accredited or the institution requests to be separately accredited, applies for separate accreditation from the regional accrediting association that accredits colleges in that state or country.

**Implementation:** If, during its review of the institution, the Commission determines that an extended unit is sufficiently autonomous to the extent that the parent campus has little or no control, the Commission will use this policy to recommend separate accreditation of the extended unit. No response is required by the institution.

*(Policy compliance: “Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution”)*

#### **Not applicable**

The institution described and provided documentation of the relationship between it and its branch campuses in the Palmetto College. Palmetto College is the central