

Regional Accreditation

SACS COC Accreditation At-a-Glance

What Is College Accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary, independent review of educational programs to determine that the education provided is of uniform and sound quality. Being awarded accreditation ensures that an institution has been evaluated and that it met set standards of quality determined by the accrediting organization granting the accreditation. A college or university's accreditation is maintained by continued adherence to the set criteria.

Why is College Accreditation Important?

There are several reasons accreditation is important:

- Ensure quality and adherence to academic standards.
- Accreditation determines a school's eligibility for participation in federal (Title IV) and state financial aid programs.
- Proper accreditation is also important for the acceptance and transfer of college credit, and is a prerequisite for many graduate programs.

The most recognized and accepted type of accreditation in the United States is regional accreditation.

Generally, college credits or degrees received at a regionally accredited institution are accepted by other regionally accredited colleges or universities (non-regionally accredited programs are not generally accepted). However, this acceptance is not guaranteed; it remains with each institution to establish its own policies based on the determination that the credits accepted meet educational objectives comparable to their own programs.

What Are the Regional Accreditation Agencies?

There are six geographic regions of the United States with an agency that accredits college and university higher education programs. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges is the regional accrediting body for the State of Tennessee, and therefore, Chattanooga State.

What is the Accreditation Process?

SACSCOC accredited institutions are reviewed for compliance at least every 5 years. In spring 2010, ChSCC submitted a Compliance Certificate document demonstrating its judgment of compliance with the SACS Principles of Accreditation. This compliance document was reviewed by an off-site committee that made its observations known to the on-site review committee. Chattanooga State has prepared a response to those observations, as well as a Quality Enhancement Plan (W.E. Succeed – Work Ethic First), and had submitted them to the on-site review committee members.

The Chattanooga State on-site review is scheduled for November 9-11, 2010.

Commission on Colleges

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

(SACSCOC) is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. 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 and Latin America and other international sites approved by the Commission on Colleges that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees.

The Commission's mission is the enhancement of educational quality throughout the region and it strives to improve the effectiveness of institutions by ensuring that institutions meet standards established by the higher education community that address the needs of society and students.

The accrediting standards used by the Commission on Colleges are contained in the handbook, Principles of Accreditation. This document provides consistent guidelines for peer review, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education.

Accreditation Process:

Six months prior to the scheduled reaffirmation visit, an institution must submit a Compliance Certification document that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Regulations as presented in the Principles. The Compliance document is reviewed by an off-site review committee whose observations and preliminary judgment of compliance are reported to the on-site review committee. On-site reviews are conducted every 5 years. **The Chattanooga State visit will take place on November 9-11, 2010.**

Each institution seeking reaffirmation of Accreditation is required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Engaging the wider academic community and addressing one or more issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic related to enhancing student learning. **Work Ethic is the Chattanooga State QEP topic, and W.E. Succeed – Work Ethic First is the title of the 5-year initiative.**

During a typical three-day visit, committee members examine data and conduct interviews in order to evaluate the soundness of the QEP and ascertain whether the institution is in compliance with the Principles. The committee offers written advice to the institution, develops a consensus on its findings, and completes a draft report, culminating in an oral exit report to the chief executive officer and invited institutional officials on the last day of the visit.

The departure of the committee from campus does not mark the end of the reaffirmation process. The Executive Council of the Commission recommends action to the Commission on Colleges, which makes the final decision of reaffirmation in Spring 2011. These decisions are announced to the College Delegate Assembly during its annual business session.