November 8, 2019

Belle S. Wheelan, President
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools,
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

Dear Ms. Wheelan:

I am writing to inform you of my decision on the renewal of recognition of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). U.S. Department of Education (Department) staff and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) have each made recommendations to me. These recommendations were made under Sections 114 and 496 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and pursuant to relevant statutory and regulatory provisions.

Both the Department staff and the NACIQI majority recommended that I now find SACSCOC compliant and grant SACSCOC renewed recognition as an institutional and programmatic accrediting agency for a period of three years. I accept the recommendations of the staff and the NACIQI to accept the compliance report submitted by SACSCOC, which documents that SACSCOC has collected “wet” signatures from its committee members, including its appeals committee members.

The Department appreciates the effort SACSCOC has made to meet the requirements of the compliance report. However, I wish to point out that in the event that SACSCOC had a policy in place that permitted the collection of electronic signatures, it would not have been out of compliance with the Department’s requirements. If SACSCOC or any accreditor wishes to be able to collect electronic signatures, it simply needs to establish such a policy in its policies and procedures manual. The Department accepts electronic signatures on any number of legal documents, so it is difficult to understand why accreditors would not be permitted the same opportunities to operate in the most efficient manner possible to receive signatures from committee members.

Accordingly, in accepting the compliance report, I grant renewed recognition to SACSCOC for a period of three years.

Scope of Recognition: The accreditation and preaccreditation (“Candidate for Accreditation”) of degree-granting institutions of higher education in Alabama, Florida, 400 MARYLAND AVE. SW, WASHINGTON, DC 20202
www.ed.gov

The Department of Education’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.
Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, including the accreditation of educational programs offered via distance and correspondence education within these institutions. The accreditation status of these institutions and their recognition extends to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and the Appeals Committee of the College Delegate Assembly on cases of initial candidacy or initial accreditation and for continued accreditation or candidacy.

Please convey my best wishes to the members of SACSCOC. We appreciate the work that the SACSCOC does to improve the quality and success of U.S. postsecondary education.

Sincerely,

Diane Auier Jones
Principal Deputy Under Secretary
Delegated to Perform the Duties of Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Education