



SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

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September 1, 2009

Statement from the Board of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

The myriad of challenges facing leaders in our country's educational system include not only the traditional issues of preparing students to be able to read, write and compute effectively but also to compete in a world that is shrinking due to the impact of technology on our everyday lives. In order to remain competitive with other industrialized nations, we must ensure that every student enrolled in our institutions successfully completes a curriculum of study that is both rigorous and effective in ensuring the development of skills for life and work.

One way the leaders of our educational system can ensure students are prepared to compete in the future is to continuously assess the effectiveness of the educational enterprise. This includes not only the currency and adequacy of the curriculum and faculty but the effectiveness of the governance and leadership of the board and administration, and the adequacy of resources (fiscal, learning and personnel), and support services. It is through the system of accreditation that institutions, from pre-kindergarten through graduate school, become stronger and achieve excellence.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) and Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) serve as the regional accrediting bodies for 11 southern states in the United States and a number of countries around the world. Currently, over 23,000 public and private schools and 800 colleges and universities have achieved accreditation by having successfully undergone the peer review process. The Board of the Association is comprised of members from the boards of the two organizations, including public consumer advocates, and meets annually to ensure the

improvement of education at all levels by recognizing and encouraging institutional quality through accreditation.

The process of accreditation is designed to provide a systematic and systemic evaluation of an institution resulting in sustainable improvement over time and yielding effective student learning. First, institutions undertake an examination of all of its components (self-study) and assess their effectiveness against an agreed upon set of standards, the basis of which is the concept of integrity. Second, this self-assessment is then reviewed by a group of the institution's peers and feedback is provided to assist the institution in its efforts to improve.

We've all read the studies that indicate that many more of the students enrolled in our Pre-K-12 system today are from low socioeconomic families and minority backgrounds, are academically and socially underprepared, and will often be the first in their family to attend college. They currently have a higher high school drop out rate than their white counterparts but are also the fastest growing segment of the population. Though they have only known a 'digital world,' these students are more often than not using the Internet for social purposes rather than academic ones.

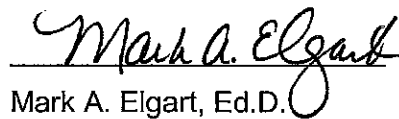
On the college side, many of these students come to college academically and personally unprepared to successfully compete in college level work. They enroll in development programs in larger percentages and are more likely to leave before they complete a degree program. This results in fewer qualified employees available in the workforce, an ill-prepared citizenry, and a reduction in our competitive posture in the global economy.

Though fewer than 40 percent of the nation's fastest growing jobs require a baccalaureate degree, 80 percent require some training beyond high school. With these changing demographics, it is imperative that educational institutions at all levels increase the number of students enrolling in and completing occupational-technical programs; additionally, they themselves need to become as strong as possible so as to ensure the success of their students and, subsequently, the competitiveness of our nation. Aligning the curriculum across the PreK-16 curriculum will support students moving seamlessly through the educational pipeline, make the transfer of credits earned by students easier, and reduce the number of roadblocks regarding faculty qualifications, etc.

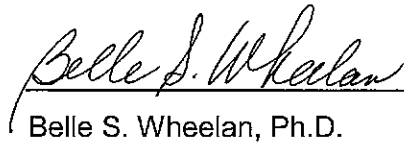
The SACS Board encourages ALL institutional members of both CASI and COC to develop further plans and to initiate additional activities of a cooperative nature to ensure a student's success. Some examples include:

- Active participation in P-20 Councils within each state to ensure a rigorous academic preparation for all students, not just those in the 'college track'
- Joint meetings of PK-12 and college/university faculty to discuss expected skills sets for successful college completion and work preparation
- More effective training of teachers and administrators for the PK-12 system by colleges/universities
- Strengthening of career/technical programs at both the high school and college level
- Stronger coordination of Dual Enrollment programs
- Potential joint summer programs hosted on college campuses that would enhance skills and provide an opportunity to 'try on' college

This list is by no means exhaustive but is designed to encourage a dialogue across the educational pipeline in the southern region. There is no more time to place blame. Nor can we afford to let students fail. We must work together to ensure ALL students are prepared for the future. Remember Students Are Central to Success.



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