



**Search for the President**  
**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges**  
**Decatur, Georgia**

**THE SEARCH**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) seeks an innovative, diplomatic, and transformative leader as its next President. As the preeminent leader for quality assurance in higher education, the mission of SACSCOC is to support the educational quality improvement, accountability, and effectiveness of its member institutions. SACSCOC is the second largest accrediting body, with almost 800 members in the United States and international institutions, and an earned reputation for rigor and excellence.

SACSCOC is at a pivotal juncture in its history as it reassesses its role in the evolving higher education accreditation landscape and positions itself within a newly open market among other institutional accreditors. The next President will be a dynamic and strategic advocate for SACSCOC, engaging the Executive Council and Board of Trustees to chart a forward-looking path that supports current member institutions and proactively seeks new national and international members. This leader will be deeply committed to building, maintaining, and inspiring a coalition of higher education leaders to navigate a rapidly changing regulatory environment.

Guided by the SACSCOC membership's shared values and practices, the next President will have a rare opportunity to shape the future of accreditation, and to enhance the operational effectiveness of SACSCOC to meet the emerging needs of the higher education sector. The President will uphold SACSCOC's high standards and drive innovation in member engagement while amplifying and marketing membership benefits. Overseeing a staff of 50, the President reports to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. By fostering close collaboration with the Executive Council and Board, staff, current and future members, the President will play a vital role in ensuring the organization's stability and growth in a complex and competitive accreditation environment. The President will make strategic, data-driven decisions to creatively broaden institutional resources and incorporate efficient and effective workflow processes while supporting the development of SACSCOC's dedicated staff. Additionally, the President will continue to foster new partnerships and deepen existing relationships with the state and federal government, the Department of Education, accrediting agencies, and higher education organizations.

SACSCOC has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the next President. All confidential inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed in confidence, as noted at the end of this document.

## **ABOUT SACSCOC**

Founded in 1895, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is an historic body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions. It serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among varied institutions, primarily in its historic service area of the Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia), Latin America, and specific other international sites approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees. The Commission also accepts applications for membership from domestic institutions in the other 42 states and international institutions of higher education worldwide.

SACSCOC supports the right of an institution to pursue its educational mission as inherent in fundamental values of institutional autonomy, the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely, and the right of students to access opportunities for learning and the open expression and exchange of ideas. However, exercising these rights should not substantially interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer a sound educational experience that optimizes student achievement outcomes.

SACSCOC employs an accountable and transparent peer review process that assures educational quality and integrity, fosters continuous self-improvement, and promotes student success while upholding six core values.

- *Integrity*
- *Continuous Quality Improvement*
- *Peer Review/Self-Regulation*
- *Accountability*
- *Student Learning*
- *Transparency*

The current [SACSCOC Strategic Plan](#) for 2023-2028 includes six strategic focus areas to continue promoting excellence in higher education.

1. *Promote Educational Quality & Student Achievement*
2. *Leverage Technology to Achieve Our Mission*
3. *Expand Training for Member Institutions, Evaluators, & SACSCOC Board Members*
4. *Communicate Institutional and Organizational Successes*
5. *Support New Pathways to Membership*
6. *Expand Support and Professional Development for SACSCOC Staff*

Serving 780 [member institutions](#) domestically and internationally, SACSCOC takes pride in the diverse missions and unique characteristics of its accrediting public and private higher education institutions. SACSCOC accredits institutions primarily located in 11 states in the southern region of the United States. Additionally, it accredits seven international institutions and conducts accreditation activities in 68 other countries.

### SACSCOC Board of Trustees

The College Delegate Assembly (CDA) includes one voting representative (the chief executive officer) from each accredited institution. It elects seventy-seven members to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to guide the organization's work and to implement the accreditation process.

The thirteen-member Executive Council is the executive arm of the Board of Trustees with primary responsibility for interpreting Commission policy and procedure. It also functions on behalf of the Board between sessions. The Chair and Vice Chair, public members, and a representative from each of the eleven southern states in the SACSCOC region make up the Executive Council membership. Council members are elected by the Board of Trustees.

SACSCOC staff of 50 vice presidents, directors, specialists, coordinators, administrative support, and operations professionals are an inclusive group of experienced, talented, supportive, and engaged individuals who are deeply committed to each other, the organization, their members, and higher education.

SACSCOC is financially healthy, with a \$14 million annual budget and approximately \$10 million contingency funding. Sixty-four percent of the budget is based on membership dues, 20 percent from the income generated by the annual meeting, and 16 percent from other small meetings, services, and fees. While financially intact, there are opportunities to build capacity for increased revenue generation via grants, fundraising, and other innovative pathways.

### *Leadership*

Dr. Belle Wheelan currently serves as President and is the first African American and first woman to serve in this capacity. Dr. Wheelan's career spans over 40 years and includes the roles of faculty member, chief student services officer, campus provost, college president, and Secretary of Education. In several of those roles, she was the first African American and/or woman to serve in those capacities. With her dedicated team, Dr. Wheelan built a substantial foundation for SACSCOC to continue to thrive, develop, and reimagine the future of higher education accreditation. She worked tirelessly to evolve SACSCOC through new programs like the Summer Institute, a focused primer on the *Principles of Accreditation* and the *Quality Enhancement Plan*, and the Small College Initiative that focuses on the challenges and accreditation needs of small, private institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); and establishing the Office of Training and Research. Under her leadership, SACSCOC modified the reaffirmation process to allow institutions to provide additional information throughout the process and adopted two new standards around board evaluation and financial literacy in response to institutional boards' challenges and federal legislators' concerns over the student loan default rate.

### **ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT**

Reporting directly to the 77-member Board of Trustees, the President serves as the chief executive officer of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). In this capacity, the President provides strategic internal leadership, ensuring operational excellence and administrative effectiveness while advancing SACSCOC's thought leadership in accreditation research, policy, and practice. This role also carries national and international influence, positioning the President as a critical

contributor to evolving conversations on quality assurance and the complex, rapidly shifting higher education landscape.

As the official spokesperson and advocate for SACSCOC, the President engages with member institutions, accrediting bodies, peer organizations, and state and federal agencies. In addition, the President serves as the Commission's liaison to the U.S. Department of Education and acts as a principal voice for accreditation at the national level. This role involves fostering the active participation of member institution presidents and chancellors across all Commission decision-making bodies, representing SACSCOC's values and accreditation standards to both stakeholders and the public. Additionally, the President supports and leads the Board of Trustees, executing decisions adopted by the Executive Council, Board of Trustees, and College Delegate Assembly, strengthening SACSCOC's commitment to quality and integrity in higher education.

## **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESIDENT**

### **Provide visionary leadership to navigate the evolving higher education landscape**

In today's politically dynamic environment, the role of an accreditation body has never been more pivotal. Heightened expectations for higher education's return on investment and evolving public scrutiny necessitate a strategic focus on external engagement with state and federal entities and key stakeholders in the education sector. To enhance the accessibility and impact of SACSCOC's accreditation services and standards, the President must exercise diplomatic acumen and possess deep insight into current and emerging legislative actions affecting students, member institutions, and the organization. This leader will be a politically and financially astute thought leader, proactively cultivating relationships with government entities to advocate for policies that advance SACSCOC's mission and the interests of accredited institutions. Through strategic, forward-thinking engagement, the President will ensure clear communication of expectations and foster partnerships that drive impactful educational outcomes.

### **Lead a complex, public organization through astute management of staff with an eye toward innovation and inclusive excellence**

SACSCOC offers a comprehensive suite of services and programs, and the President will develop a deep understanding of each division's specialized expertise, building strong, collaborative relationships across the organization. As a practical and empathetic leader, the President will celebrate the achievements of the SACSCOC team and foster a culture grounded in transparency, accountability, collaboration, and innovation. By empowering staff to utilize their diverse talents and strengths fully, the President will help shape a dynamic and resilient organization.

The incoming President will inherit an exceptionally skilled and mission-driven staff deeply committed to upholding SACSCOC's standards of rigor and eager to embrace innovative work models. With this wealth of institutional knowledge and dedication, the President will have the opportunity to strategically harness this expertise while planning for future leadership. Additionally, the President will continue to advance inclusive excellence in recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and professional development in partnership with the director of human resources and managers.

The President will champion initiatives to enhance operational efficiency, standardize processes, and focus on staff training, retention, and professional development. With an emphasis on adopting and

integrating new technologies, the President will equip the SACSCOC team and its member institutions to remain adaptive and future-ready, ensuring the organization meets evolving challenges and continues to advance its mission effectively.

### **Actively support member institutions while creating the capacity to evolve and increase services and member professional development**

SACSCOC takes pride in its high-touch approach to member engagement, delivering personalized peer review and support while upholding the highest standards of rigor. The President will proactively engage with member institutions, fostering clear, consistent communication to ensure awareness of current policies and new development opportunities. While the SACSCOC Annual Meeting serves over 3,600 participants, there is substantial potential to enhance support and resources for members throughout the year. Working closely with directors, the President will lead the strategic expansion of professional development offerings, adopting a range of delivery methods—including in-person, online, and hybrid formats—to meet diverse needs effectively.

### **Expand membership base through innovative and data-driven marketing efforts**

With new dynamics recently introduced to the accreditation landscape, the President will collaborate with directors to implement data-driven strategies for marketing to prospective members both domestically and internationally to boost membership. With increasing interest from institutions abroad seeking U.S. accreditation, SACSCOC is well-positioned to expand its global membership. By seizing these opportunities, the President will support sustainable growth and strengthen SACSCOC's impact within and beyond U.S. borders.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

- An accomplished leader with experience in an executive leadership role or the equivalent in higher education, state or federal government, or related field(s); with familiarity and knowledge of the accreditation process preferred;
- An advanced degree from a regionally accredited institution; an earned doctorate is preferred;
- The capacity to navigate and balance the diverse demands of a complex public organization, encompassing effective management, advocacy, and serving as SACSCOC's public representative;
- Demonstrated understanding of the higher education setting or similar organizations as well as the political landscape impacting higher education policy and accreditation;
- A broad and deep knowledge of quality improvement, preferably in higher education, and the ability to visualize future stages of innovation to enhance outcomes;
- The ability to lead and oversee changes needed in SACSCOC's standards and procedures in alignment with the needs and demands of current and future students;
- The ability to balance the leadership and management of internal operations and engagement in national and international issues and activities;
- Record of fiscal responsibility and strong business acumen with a track record of utilizing technology to further the goals and strategies of the organization;
- The disposition, sharp political astuteness, and experience to provide leadership for national and international conversations about accreditation's role in quality assurance;
- Passion for working with government, public policy, and higher education leaders with the ability to serve as a consummate diplomat;

- Demonstrated experience with strategic planning, organizational change management, team building, and data literacy;
- Proven ability to advance inclusive excellence and lead using transparent communication, collaboration, and mutual respect;
- The willingness and ability to engage in significant travel throughout the U.S. and some international travel.

#### **APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS**

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the [Isaacson, Miller search page](#). Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

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#### **EEO Statement**

*SACSCOC is an equal opportunity employer and provides equal employment opportunity for its employees and all applicants without regard to age, color, disability, genetic information, veterans' status, national origin, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, or any other legally protected status. SACSCOC does not discriminate in hiring, training, compensation, benefits, promotion, transfer, discipline, termination, or other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment because of any legally protected status.*