

Academic Affairs Policy 2.26

Accreditation

I. Policy Statement

The Board of Regents (BOR) recognizes the importance of accreditation to institutions of higher education: through regular, United States Department of Education (US ED)-recognized accreditor reviews, institutions have opportunities to examine and reflect on their goals, outcomes, policies, processes, and institutional integrity. In addition, institution-level accreditation by US ED-recognized accreditors is required to provide institutions with access to Title IV funding. Likewise, accreditation signals to the public—including to potential students—that an institution has met standards of quality and performance in a variety of areas, among them student support and achievement; faculty adequacy and qualifications; program quality and rigor; fiduciary responsibility; planning, assessment, and reporting; governance; and adherence to mission and federally mandated standards.

II. Introduction

The Board of Regents, in coordination with Louisiana's public postsecondary management boards, adopts policies and procedures to authorize each public postsecondary institution to select an accreditor from an approved list, to monitor compliance with the accrediting body's standards, and to identify an office or office holder responsible for facilitating the accreditation process, including the development of reports at the time of application for accreditation as well as during any additional reporting required between instances of reaffirmation.

Each institution shall post on its website the current status of its institutional accreditation and, where applicable, the current status of any required specialized accreditation. In coordination with the Board of Regents, each management board shall ensure that each institution under its jurisdiction updates the public at least annually through the institution's website regarding progress toward reaffirmation, reaccreditation with the same accreditor, or accreditation with a new accreditor. Each institution shall also post or otherwise make publicly available, in the manner determined by its management board, relevant documentation submitted to an accreditor to gain or maintain accreditation.

Through their management boards, institutions must notify the Board of Regents regarding any change in accreditation status, including sanction, required corrective action, loss or forfeiture of accreditation, whether at the institution or program level.

III. Definitions

- **Institutional Accrediting Body:** An accreditor of educational institutions recognized by the US DE.
- **Accreditation:** A process through which an institution of higher education or a unit, program, or professional school offered by an institution of higher education is reviewed by a panel of peer

reviewers external to the institution and according to the standards established by the accrediting body.

- **Reaffirmation:** The process of applying for an accreditation review at the end of the accrediting body's fixed cycle, which varies among accreditors from 7 to 10 years.
- **Institutional integrity:** The demonstration that an institution is in compliance with accreditation standards of honesty, transparency, ethical conduct, and accountability.
- **Finding:** An instance of failure to comply with a standard set by the accrediting body.
- **Sanction or special accreditation status pending corrective action:** An action taken if an institution does not correct the instance of noncompliance cited in a finding.
- **Management Board:** One of four public postsecondary management boards in Louisiana, i.e., the Louisiana Community and Technical Colleges (LCTC), Louisiana State University (LSU), Southern University (SU), and the University of Louisiana (ULS)
- **US DE:** United States Department of Education.
- **CHEA:** Council for Higher Education Accreditation
- **Programmatic or Specialized Accreditor:** An accreditor of specific educational programs, departments, or other units within a college or university (e.g., ABET, AACSB, AVMA, CAEP) recognized by the US ED or CHEA.

IV. List of BOR-approved Institutional Accreditors

The BOR recognizes the following (US ED)-recognized institutional accreditors and authorizes public institutions, in partnership with their respective management boards, to identify an accreditor of choice from the approved list below, to engage in the application process, to apply for accreditation, and to remain active in this work on a regular basis.

- Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
- New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
- The Commission on Colleges and Universities (formerly SACSCOC)
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)

The list above constitutes the BOR's approved list of institutional accreditors for Louisiana public postsecondary institutions. Each accreditor on the list must be recognized by the United States Department of Education. The BOR may revise, supplement, or otherwise update this list, in coordination with the management boards, to include any institutional accreditor recognized by the United States Department of Education, provided that the accreditor meets the requirements of this policy and applicable state law.

V. Process for Changing Institutional Accreditors

Individual public postsecondary institutions, subject to the approval of their respective management boards, are authorized by law to change accreditors when such a change is deemed advantageous to the institution. Institutions are encouraged to consider the practical aspects of making such changes, such as

the possible overlap of accreditors as one set of standards is phased out and a new one is phased in; the ways in which a change in accreditors may affect students, faculty, staff, and the institution itself; and the costs related to moving from one accreditor to another.

An institution seeking to change its institutional accreditor should notify its management board in writing of the proposed alternative accreditor. The institution's request may then be considered by its management board for approval to proceed. Only upon management board approval to proceed may the institution apply to the US ED for permission to seek alternative accreditation and subsequently begin the candidacy process with the new accreditor. The institution must remain accredited by an accreditor from the authorized list at all times. Consequently, where necessary, dual accreditation must be maintained to ensure continuity of accreditation.

VI. Factors for Consideration

In evaluating whether a proposed new institutional accreditor is appropriate, the institution and its management board shall consider whether the accreditor prioritizes the following: credential success and workforce outcomes; educational quality and affordability; financial stability; and appropriate accountability through the rigorous annual review of faculty. Any institutional application to change accreditors shall address these factors in writing, together with any additional factors deemed appropriate to their institutional mission, as part of the materials submitted to the management board.

No management board may approve a proposed accreditor without a written assurance by the accreditor that it will not condition initial accreditation or continued accreditation upon any violation of the Constitution of Louisiana or any applicable law. Documentation of this written assurance shall be included in the institution's application materials and retained by the institution and its management board.

VII. Programmatic or Specialized Accreditations

The Board of Regents, in coordination with the management boards, shall identify and maintain a list of units, programs, professional schools, and other academic units at public postsecondary institutions for which specialized accreditation, certification or licensure is required. The Board of Regents shall also identify and maintain a corresponding list of specialized accreditors or other certifying bodies for those units, programs, and professional schools that are recognized by US DE or CHEA.

Each public postsecondary institution shall ensure that any unit, program, or professional school, that is required to maintain specialized accreditation remains accredited at all times by an accreditor included on the BOR's list of recognized specialized accreditors, unless otherwise authorized by the BOR in coordination with the appropriate management board and in accordance with AA 2.13.

A public postsecondary institution seeking a new specialized accreditor for a department, program, professional school, or other academic unit shall apply for approval with its management board. The proposed specialized accreditor must be included on the Board of Regents' list of recognized specialized accreditors or must be approved for addition to that list before the institution proceeds with the accreditation process.

This policy in no way prohibits a postsecondary institution from voluntarily maintaining specialized accreditation, certification, or licensure for a unit, program, or professional school that is not on the BOR's list, provided that action is appropriately approved by its management board and that the chosen accreditor does not condition accreditation upon any violation of the Constitution of Louisiana or any applicable law.

VIII. Responsibility for Maintenance and Cost of Accreditation

Individual institutions are responsible for maintaining institutional accreditation as well as any required specialized accreditation of any of its individual units, programs, or professional schools and for covering all costs related to that process.