

SECTION 3: Basic Eligibility Standards

- 3.1.a** An institution seeking to gain or maintain accredited status has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies. *(Degree-granting authority)* [CR]

Rationale and Notes

SACSCOC accredits degree-granting institutions in the southern region of the United States and those operating in select international locations. To gain or maintain accreditation with SACSCOC, an institution is a continuously functioning organization legally authorized to grant degrees and other academic credentials, and able to demonstrate compliance with SACSCOC standards and policies.

To gain or maintain accreditation with SACSCOC, an institution must be legally authorized to grant degrees and other academic credentials. The authorization must be appropriate for the degree levels offered (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, or doctoral) and for the geographic locations where the degrees are offered. Because education in the United States largely operates under the jurisdiction of states, typically such authorization is granted through state legislation, sometimes by language contained in state constitutions, or sometimes by issuance of a charter. More often, authority appears in other supplemental laws, and—more recently—through actions of state education coordinating boards or other state offices. International institutions and U.S. institutions with international sites should be clear as to what authorization is required at non-U.S. locations.

NOTES

Institutions seeking reaffirmation of accreditation do not need to address this standard in a report unless the basis of its degree-granting authority has changed; examples might be site expansion into a new state, or a merger, or change in governance.

This requirement is more specific than simply evidencing that an institution legally exists.

Institutions that offer distance education programs to out-of-state students should address how they ensure appropriate “state authorization” for such students.

Questions to Consider

- What agency or agencies have the legal power to authorize the institution to grant degrees?
- When was this authorization initially or most recently approved?
- Are there any conditions as part of the approvals? If so, by whom and for what reasons?
- If the institution offers degrees at branch campuses and off-campus instructional sites located in other states, what is the evidence of multiple authorizations?

- If the institution offers distance education programs or courses, how does it determine whether it has appropriate state authorization for out-of-state students?
- If the institution offers degrees internationally, what is the evidence of authorization by each country?
- Is the institution required to report changes in program offerings to the agencies? If so, when was the last report filed?

Sample Documentation

- Copies of the official charter enabling legislation, or other legal document granting the institution degree-granting authority.
- Official documentation of what authority is needed in the state (e.g., wording of a statute delegating power to the secretary of state or to a higher education governing board).
- Additional information establishing the extent of the degree-granting authority, including any conditions attached.
- Additional information establishing operating authority for out-of-state sites, out-of-state distance education students, and international sites.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

None noted.

- 3.1.b** An institution seeking to gain or maintain accredited status offers all coursework required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. (For exceptions, see SACSCOC policy [Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternative Approach](#).) (*Coursework for degrees*) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

Because SACSCOC accredits only degree-granting institutions, the general expectation is that the institution has the capability to offer the range of coursework necessary for a student to earn the degree. Of course, this does not preclude an institution from having partnerships and consortial agreements, accepting coursework for transfer of credit, and the like. But for at least one degree program at each degree level at which the institution offers degrees (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, and/or doctoral), the expectation is that a student could earn the degree by coursework offered solely by the accredited institution. The rationale for this standard is that this