



February 11, 2016

The Honorable Jay Dardenne
Commissioner of Administration
State of Louisiana
P. O. Box 94095
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9095

Dear Mr. Dardenne:

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the regional accrediting body for 800 public, private and for-profit institutions of higher education in eleven southern states including the State of Louisiana. SACSCOC is one of seven regional accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to assure quality in higher education and to serve as the gate-keeper to federal financial aid (Title IV) for students in our region. I am writing to you today on their behalf regarding the impact the fiscal crisis in the State of Louisiana is having on the accreditation of the institutions in your state.

One of the *Principles of Accreditation* is the demonstration of “a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services” (Core Requirement 2.11.1). SACSCOC has become aware of the fact that because of the lack of financial resources from the state, the institutions the Commission accredits may have to cease operation PRIOR TO the end of the current semester. This would mean (1) students would not be able to complete classes and, subsequently, earn no credit for courses taken this semester, potentially impacting their financial aid eligibility, and (2) payroll will not be met and bills would not be paid placing employees in an untenable financial situation as well as negatively impacting the credit ratings of the institutions.

If the institutions have to suspend operations or close in the next several months, federal regulations dictate that they must provide SACSCOC with a plan for how students can continue at another college or university (Teach-out plan) which the Commission must approve and which might send students to another state. This would create a tremendous hardship on students who might be unable to get a job because the completion of their degree is needed or, worst case scenario, they might drop out of college all together.

If the institutions are unable to demonstrate continued financial stability or continue to enroll students, the Board of SACSCOC would have to consider a public sanction of the institutions or a withdrawal of their accreditation. Public sanctions have a chilling effect on the enrollment of potential students and withdrawal of accreditation results in the loss of federal financial aid.

Having served as president of two institutions and as Secretary of Education to a Governor in Virginia, I am painfully aware of the difficulty state leadership has in making budgetary decisions but the lack



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of state funding is putting Louisiana colleges and universities in **SERIOUS** risk and placing students' academic careers in jeopardy. I know the challenges are many but I believe it is important for you to know the impact your decisions will have **BEFORE** you finalize your plans.

As you deal with these tough financial decisions, if you have any questions regarding their impact on the accreditation of the institutions in Louisiana, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belle S. Wheelan".

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.
President

BSW:rb

cc: Louisiana Institutional Members of SACSCOC
The Honorable John Bel Edwards, Governor
The Honorable Eric LaFleur, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Cameron Henry, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Dr. Joseph C. Rallo, Commissioner of Higher Education
Dr. Mark E. Keenum, Chair, SACSCOC Board of Trustees