

REGIONAL ACCREDITATION OF SOUTHERN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Xaris Sofia and Ilane Xochitl, whose existence fill my heart with happiness. They have been the source of courage and motivation throughout this program. I love them dearly. I dedicate this work to my strong and supportive wife, Calia, who adapted to our new family dynamics so that I could complete my degree. I am genuinely thankful for having you in my life. I could not have achieved this milestone without you in my corner.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Juana “Juanita” Salome, a fighter and my hero. You instilled the importance of education and the love for learning since I was a child. I owe you everything I have. I also dedicate this dissertation to my father’s memory, who taught me the value of hard work and discipline. Thank you so much, Papa!

And most especially, I dedicate this research to God Almighty, my source of strength, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Thanks be to God.

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ABSTRACT

Regional Accreditation of Southern Colleges and Universities

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Higher education regional accreditation presents problems for colleges and universities in the Southern states. Research on regional accreditation has focused on qualitative approaches to understand how institutions experience accreditation reviews or on quantitative methodologies to examine a single issue of accreditation compliance. However, research has not examined the results of reaffirmation reviews in an entire region and in relation to institutional characteristics. This study aims to examine regional accreditation records of two-year and four-year institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) membership to understand the most challenging standards of accreditation and explore the relationship between accreditation noncompliance and institutional characteristics.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze institutions' accreditation citations as related to selected institutional characteristics. Through a dimensionality reduction, four accreditation standards factors emerged as the most difficult to comply with for the Southern institutions (Institutional Effectiveness, Competence and Performance, Financial Stability, and Student Achievement). However, institutions significantly reduced the number of noncompliance citations by the end of the accreditation review suggesting the effectiveness of

the reaffirmation process. Among other results, the size of an institution, in terms of its student enrollment, did not show a relationship to noncompliance with the Institutional Effectiveness, Competence and Performance, and Student Achievement factors; yet, larger institutions were more likely to address Financial Stability noncompliance issues than smaller institutions. Additionally, only institutional characteristics like Type of institution and Graduation rate had a significant effect on the number of accreditation citations received at the initial review stage.

This study contributes to the existing regional accreditation literature by bringing attention to institutional characteristics and their role during a reaffirmation review. Further research is needed in regional accreditation to identify other issues in higher education that hinder institutions from navigating the reaffirmation review process more effectively.

Keywords: institutional effectiveness, institutional characteristics, reaffirmation review, regional accreditation, SACSCOC

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1800s, regional accreditation has existed as a form of quality assurance in higher education to guarantee institutions are committed to delivering the highest quality of education (Brittingham, 2009). In the United States, seven regional agencies accredit colleges and universities and their programs (Council for Higher Education Accreditation [CHEA], n.d.-a). Even though regional accreditation is a voluntary process of accountability, institutions of higher education opt to seek and maintain regional accreditation as an assertion to their constituencies that quality of education is their central priority (U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). Accreditation indicates that institutions meet a set of membership criteria approved by the appropriate regional agency (Agron, 2009). Furthermore, accreditation is a requirement for postsecondary institutions to grant federal funding and loan programs to students. Thus, according to the U. S. Department of Education (2020a), every institution seeking federal funding available to its students must be accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the federal government.

Often colleges and universities find themselves in trouble with regional accreditors due to an unsuccessful evaluation (Baylor, 2010; Young, 2010). The reasons for failed evaluations are many and intricate. Subsequent sections elaborate further on the common reasons why institutions fail an evaluation review. Despite the reasons, the most damaging outcome of a failed accreditation evaluation for an institution is the total loss of accreditation (Young, 2010). When reaching this stage, the unaccredited institution does not have many alternatives. The school either offers teach-out plans to students before closing its doors, merges with an accredited institution, or seeks accreditation elsewhere under a different agency recognized by the federal

government (i.e., see *Paine College v. Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges*, 2018; *St. Andrews Presbyterian College v. Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges*, 2009; St. Andrews University, 2020; Young, 2010).

In the Southern United States, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is authorized by the U. S. Department of Education to accredit postsecondary institutions. The agency, founded in 1895, has a long tradition in eleven Southern States, including Texas, and several institutions in Latin America. The Commission on Colleges accredits both public and private 4-year and some 2-year institutions. Member institutions are evaluated against a set of standards known as principles of accreditation. SACSCOC reaffirms the accreditation of a determined number of institutions every seven to ten years through a three-phased peer-review process (SACSCOC, 2010, 2012; Wheelan, 2017).

During the three-phased review process, SACSCOC statistics show that many institutions have difficulty demonstrating compliance with some standards. Research on regional accreditation compliance has examined the results from review committees. It shows that in most cases, institutions fail to demonstrate compliance with some accreditation standards due to lack of evidence or documentation, inconsistent implementation of the principles of accreditation, or poor performance (SACSCOC, 2006). Most of the literature on accreditation research has primarily focused on programmatic accreditation (Anderson & Garman, 2018; Davis, 2018; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Stiewing, 2001), which concentrates on the quality, regulatory requirements, and quantitative metrics of programs, departments, or schools within an institution (Nicklin et al., 2017; U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). Some quantitative metrics may include institutional characteristics (e.g., type of institution, size of the institutions, academic offering, location, graduation rate, etc.) (Nagle et al., 2018). However, regional accreditation

research has not explored in-depth how external factors such as institutional characteristics might be associated with the outcome of an accreditation review. Institutional characteristics may distinguish the institution's capability to offer quality education and meet accreditation criteria and whether certain institutional characteristics constitute systemic barriers to accreditation.

Therefore, research on the regional accreditation issues in the United States Southern region could reveal how accreditors have judged postsecondary institutions based on compliance with an extensive list of accreditation standards. SACSCOC statistics show that some member institutions have difficulty demonstrating compliance with some standards putting their accreditation at risk. In the Southern region, postsecondary institutions vary in size, program offering, resources, governance, and other characteristics, and this institutional diversity may be associated with different accreditation results. Examining the relationship between regional accreditation sanctions and institutional characteristics could reveal patterns applicable to higher education institutions and SACSCOC.

Problem Statement

In the United States, regional accreditation is part of the postsecondary education system. Today, policymakers and accreditation agencies rely on the effectiveness of accreditation reviews and accreditation research to legislate federal mandates that impact institutions' policies, procedures, and practices (*For Institutions*, n.d.; *For Policymakers*, n.d.). Accreditation is also important for college administrators and faculty because it serves as a self-evaluation of the institution and its academic programs (Bertrand, 2013). Previous studies have used qualitative methods to understand the experiences of faculty, administrators, trustees, or the public related to accreditation issues in higher education (Ferrara, 2007; Fuchko, 2019; Lattimore et al., 2012). Even though these qualitative studies enrich the field of accreditation research, no study has

identified which accreditation standards are the most challenging. In addition, no study has identified which review stage (i.e., off-site, on-site, and board review) institutions receive the most citations. Quantitative research is also needed to study specific institutional characteristics as they relate to the outcome of an accreditation review and produce evidence-based results that accreditors, faculty, and administrators can use. This study seeks to fill that gap to expand accreditation knowledge boundaries and answer questions that researchers and practitioners have not addressed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine accreditation records of two-year and four-year institutions in the SACSCOC membership that underwent a comprehensive review between 2013 and 2018. The study has two main objectives: to gain an understanding of the most challenging standards of accreditation that institutions fail to meet that might contribute to an institution's undesirable sanctions and to explore the relationship between the accreditation noncompliance and institutional characteristics.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the most challenging accreditation standards during each level of review?

Are there any changes in noncompliance evaluation over the 3-stage review process?

RQ2: What are the accreditation standards factors obtained by dimensionality reduction, and which factors are the most challenging? Are the most challenging accreditation standards factors mapping the 2012 SACSCOC standards?

RQ3: For the selected most challenging accreditation standards factors, are there differences in the mean scores by review level and selected institutional characteristics?

RQ4: What is the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and institutional characteristics?

Method

The study is based on a sample of two-year and four-year institutions' accreditation reviews completed by SACSCOC. Two-year institutions are described as those authorized to offer at least a two-year program terminating in an associate's degree or authorized to provide programs towards a baccalaureate degree, namely technical colleges or community colleges. Four-year institutions represent institutions with degree offerings of baccalaureate degrees or higher. Accreditation review outcomes between the years 2013 through 2018 are merged with institutional characteristics data from IPEDS 2018 to create a single dataset. To address the research questions, the quantitative analysis consists of descriptive and multivariate statistics (e.g., ANOVA tests, multiple linear regression, Categorical Principal Component Analysis).

Theoretical Framework

Colleges and universities all across the United States are complex postsecondary institutions where their hierarchical structures are modeled through organizational diagrams (Manning, 2017). Higher education institutions, as organizations, differ from each other in many ways. However, higher education institutions are simultaneously regulated by larger organizations through laws and rules standardizing their purpose and holding them accountable to desired outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

First, this study is guided by the theory of compliance, which refers to the belief that organizational outcomes are higher when laws, standards, and principles of ethical conduct are applied by regulating bodies such as the federal government, state-level authorities, or commissions (*Compliance Dictionary*, n.d.). Through this lens, external bodies expect

organizations to deliver results abiding by one of three types of power: coercive, utilitarian, or normative (Etzioni, 1961), the latter being suitable to the field of higher education. The second theoretical framework, organizational theory, draws from beliefs that organizational performance develops as a result of structural design and changes, strategic plans, and organizational characteristics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) that affect how organizations and their members interact internally and externally. This dissertation relies on the combination of these two theoretical frameworks, compliance theory and organizational theory, to guide the research design and the discussion of findings.

Researcher's Standpoint

The interest in studying regional accreditation and institutional characteristics emerged from my experience as a college educator, accreditation liaison, and institutional effectiveness practitioner. On one hand, I noticed that some faculty and administrators perceive accreditation as a “barrier or busy work” that does not pay adequate attention to compliance matters or the overall benefit to institutions. On the other hand, institutions overlook IPEDS data when it comes to their applicability in the decision-making process. Moreover, completing all IPEDS surveys is a time-consuming process. Yet, the time and effort it takes to complete these surveys do not translate into time and work institutions spend analyzing them.

It is important to mention that comments and views in this section are based on personal experiences. However, the attitudes and lack of focus toward accreditation sparked the curiosity that motivated this research study. As an example of such experiences, in November of 2019, I conducted interviews with four accreditation experts from higher education institutions in Texas and Florida. During the interviews, participants were asked what part of their accreditation

responsibilities was most challenging. One interviewee responded, “My least favorite part is actually the assessment of learning.” Another interviewee said,

You know, the major involvement is in the QEP (*Quality Enhancement Plan*) and the assessment of student learning. And I think our older faculty that have been through the SACS evaluation have a pretty good understanding of SLOs (*Student Learning Outcomes*). I have some new faculty that are being trained to have a better understanding of SLOs and SACS. But you know, I think they recognize that we try to do as much as we can and let them teach. They appreciate that, but that means we trust that they stay on top of their assessment of student learning.

This work is also important to me at a personal level because it contributes to my professional and academic growth. It culminates a phase of my academic development that started as a curiosity several years ago. Additionally, the results will lay a pathway to postgraduate research in the field of regional accreditation. Although the study has started as a result of personal observations and experiences with the accreditation process, I do not feel influenced one way or the other in my research. I am confident that a study based on conducting a quantitative analysis of data would eliminate any possible biases related to my previous observations and experiences with the process.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

Accreditation serves as a measure of quality assurance and accountability. Researchers have approached the field of accreditation by studying a single principle of accreditation related to student learning outcomes (Provezis, 2010), by examining the accreditation review process outside of the United States (Honda, 2012), or by examining accreditation problems at minority-serving institutions (Baylor, 2010). However, regional accreditation has not been a highly

explored field in higher education and educational policy studies. As one of the most comprehensive studies on regional accreditation reviews to date, this quantitative research offers a broader view of the accreditation process and institutional compliance results for scholars interested in inferential studies on regional accreditation as related to institutional characteristics. Accreditation outcomes from a regional accrediting agency serving a multitude of higher education institutions, the specific focus on their characteristics, and the inclusion of all principles of accreditation in a comprehensive study, open a new scholarly research territory.

Definition of Key Terms

This dissertation uses several key terms for which I provide the following definitions to help the reader better understand my study.

Accreditation

It is a process by which “institutions of higher education demonstrate acceptable levels of quality” (U. S. Department of Education, 2020b).

Accrediting agencies (Accreditors)

“Private educational associations of regional or national scope. Accreditors develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met” (U. S. Department of Education, 2020b). The accrediting agency that provided the data for the study was the Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

Accreditation liaison

The accreditation liaison is a full-time professional staff who serves as a liaison between the Commission and the institution on various matters, particularly during the self-study and evaluation process. The liaison officer also serves as a source of information on the campus

about accreditation and the institution's accrediting agencies (*Accreditation Liaison Officer*, 1983)

Accreditation outcome

This dissertation uses the term accreditation outcome to indicate the accreditation review findings from on-site or off-site committees.

Accreditation review

It is a coordinated examination of an institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* performed by SACSCOC committees (SACSCOC, 2010; SACSCOC, 2012).

Accreditation standards

It is an extensive list of requirements for all SACSCOC institutions. Four major categories of these standards are *Principle of Integrity, Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements* (SACSCOC, 2012; SACSCOC, 2010). This dissertation uses the terms Principles and Standards interchangeably.

Accreditation citation

A written statement noting the compliance failures with an accreditation standard.

Accreditation status

The result of an *Accreditation Review* is a “public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements.” (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 2; SACSCOC, 2010, p. 2).

Colleges and universities

This term refers to all postsecondary institutions, including technical colleges, two-year colleges (community colleges), four-year colleges, and universities.

Compliance

Compliance is a “state of accordance between two sides.” On one side, there are people’s behavior or actions, and on the other side, there are predefined explicit rules, procedures, conventions, standards, guidelines, principles, legislation, or other norms (Foorthuis & Bos, 2011).

Institutional characteristics

As described by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) (NCES), “institutional characteristics are basic information about an institution, including mission, student services, athletics, and campus information.” The institutional characteristics of focus in this study are sector, level, location, degrees, admissions, cost, completion, enrollment, FTE employees, financial aid, revenue, and graduation rate.

Institutional effectiveness

This dissertation borrows from SACSCOC principles of accreditation (SACSCOC, 2012) to define Institutional Effectiveness (IE) as the process of research-based planning and evaluation that institutions of higher education take to ensure they are accomplishing their mission. IE is carried through a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, outcomes, and continuous efforts that demonstrate improvement in institutional quality.

Integrated postsecondary education statistics (IPEDS)

“It is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). IPEDS gathers information from every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in the federal student financial aid programs.” (*About IPEDS*, n.d.). This research uses the Institutional Characteristics survey data.

Principles of accreditation

SACSCOC establishes requirements to member institutions in its *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* manual (SACSCOC, 2012). These requirements serve as standards for accreditation for all SACSCOC institutions.

Quality assurance

In higher education, quality assurance “refers to the process of maintaining standards reliably and consistently by applying criteria of success in a course, program, or institution” (Mishra, 2007, p. 88).

Reaffirmation

Action that confirms an institution’s accreditation status after completing a comprehensive accreditation review demonstrating compliance with appropriate accreditation standards.

Regional accreditation

Regional accreditation refers to the accreditation process for institutions in a specific geographical region of the United States. This study focuses on the southern area of the country. In this region, SACSCOC is the only regional agency authorized to accredit institutions from 11 Southern States.

Sanctions

Sanctions are the result of a lack of compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*. Per SACSCOC policy, the commission may place an institution on one of the following two sanctions SACSCOC (2018):

Warning - “is usually, but not necessarily, levied in the earlier stages of institutional review and often, but not necessarily, precedes Probation. An institution may be placed on

Warning for non-compliance with any of the *Core Requirements* or significant non-compliance with the other Standards.”

Probation – “failure to correct deficiencies or failure to make satisfactory progress toward compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, whether or not the institution is already on *Warning*, may result in the institution being placed on *Probation*.”

U. S. Department of Education

The federal government agency “establishes policy for, administers, and coordinates most federal assistance to education” (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). The department of education implements educational policy and law for the nations.

Summary

Regional accreditation reviews are important events for most colleges and universities in the United States because the results indicate the institutions have achieved standards of higher education quality (U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). The result of a comprehensive and successful accreditation review allows schools to gain access to federal financial programs for their students. In the Southern geographical region of the United States, SACSCOC conducts comprehensive accreditation reviews through a three-stage approach. The literature on regional accreditation has mainly revealed issues identified during the review process as well as the perceptions of those involved in the process. However, quantitative research on an entire Southern region had not been conducted, and no previous research connected the accreditation review process with the characteristics of higher education institutions. This chapter introduced the research problem and the purpose of the study, brief summaries of the theoretical framework and the method, the researcher's standpoint, significance of the proposed study and the definition of key terms. Chapter two presents the existing literature pertinent to this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explores the field of regional accreditation and key issues institutions of postsecondary education face while continuing their accreditation. The literature review includes brief historical information on regional accreditation in the United States and a presentation of regional accreditation regions. Then I focus on the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), where I recall the Commission's origin and its roles in accreditation, introduce the Principles of Accreditation (2012), describe the components of the accreditation process, and address the most common accreditation issues in the southern region. The chapter continues with a discussion of higher education accountability, including a concise description of high-quality education in accreditation, the connection between accountability and regional accreditation, and the relevance of institutional characteristics in the accreditation process. The chapter ends with the study's theoretical framework that introduces the theory of compliance and the organizational theory as they apply to accreditation research in higher education.

American Higher Education Accreditation

Scope and History

In the United States, the Department of Education recognizes external agencies as reliable authorities to approve higher education institutions for regional accreditation¹ (U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). Regional accreditation is the process by which postsecondary institutions demonstrate quality standards based on documented evidence (Stura et al., 2019). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) defines regional accreditation as “a

¹ For this study, ‘regional accreditation’ and ‘accreditation’ are used interchangeably.

voluntary peer-review process of the quality of institutions and their programs (CHEA, n. d.-a). Accreditation is essential for colleges and universities all across the country and territories because it communicates to the public that institutions offer quality programs and that federal financial assistance is available to students (Ewell, 2008).

Accreditation had existed in the U. S. since the late 1800s when higher education institutions had already been established in Colonial America for over two centuries, with Harvard College's founding in 1636 (Brittingham, 2009). The interest in higher education accountability started as a result of curriculum disagreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions (Hegji, 2017). Hence, in 1885, the New England colonies organized the first voluntary association of postsecondary institutions to create accountability guidelines as conditions for affiliation (Webb, 2006). This association became the first regional accrediting agency in America known as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Two years later, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools was established, and in 1895, SACSCOC was created (Brittingham, 2009). The term “accreditation” became common in the U.S. around the mid-1900s to denote a peer-review process of educational quality, and today it is used in the same sense. This process continued until 2012 when the Western Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) was created.

Regional Accreditation Agencies

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes only seven regional agencies (U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). The seven regional agencies are responsible for accrediting colleges, universities, and their programs in six defined geographical regions of the United States: 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), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), and Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). WSCUC and ACCJC oversee the same geographical region (i.e., the Western states), although WSCUC accredits senior colleges and universities, and ACCJC accredits community colleges and junior colleges. These accreditation associations cover all 50 states and U.S. Territories (U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). All seven regional accreditation agencies are part of the council of regional accrediting commissions (C-RAC) comprised of the presidents of the seven regional accrediting commissions and their Board Chairs (C-RAC, 2018). Table 1.1 provides an overview of the agencies’ geographical region coverage, formation, and mission statements:

Table 1.1

Regional Accrediting Agency and Criteria for Accreditation

Agency	Geographical area	Formation	Mission
Higher Learning Commission	Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming	1895	“Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning.” (HLC, 2020, para. 2)
Middle States Commission on Higher Education	Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands	1919	“to assure students and the public of the educational quality of higher education.” (MSCHE, 2020, para. 2)
New England Commission of Higher Education	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont.	1885	“to exercise a dual role of quality assurance and encouraging continuous improvement for degree-granting institutions of higher education.” (NECHE, 2019, p. 1)

Agency	Geographical area	Formation	Mission
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities	Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington	1917	“to apply evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success.” (NWCCU, 2020, para. 4)
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia	1895	“to assure the educational quality and improve the effectiveness of its member institutions.” (SACSCOC, 2020, para. 3)
Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission	California, Hawaii, and the Pacific Basin	1962	“to encourage continuous institutional improvement and assure the membership and its constituencies, including the public, that accredited institutions are fulfilling their missions in service to their students and the public good.” (WASCUC, n.d. para. 1)
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges	California, Hawaii, and the Pacific Basin	2012	“to advance educational quality and student learning and achievement.” (ACCJC, 2020, para. 1)

A brief examination of the regional agencies’ mission statements indicates that the primary role of accreditation is to hold institutions accountable through quality assurance and institutional effectiveness processes. In addition, despite geographical region, accrediting agencies align with each other through shared goals towards higher education outcomes.

Southern Regional Accreditation in the U.S.

Origin and Role of SACSCOC

In the country's southern geographical region, SACSCOC accredits degree-granting institutions of higher education from eleven (11) states. The agency, founded on November 6, 1895, in Atlanta, Georgia, under the name of The Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, chartered six universities and 13 secondary schools to establish quality standards (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2007). The original purposes of The Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States were to “1) organize Southern schools and colleges for mutual assistance and cooperation; 2) elevate the standard of scholarship and bring about uniformity of entrance requirements; and 3) develop preparatory schools and eliminate preparatory work from the colleges” (United States Office of Education, 1959, p. 64).

By 1912 the agency began accrediting secondary schools, and by 1917 began accrediting institutions of higher education from fourteen (14) states (Walker, 1912). Today, the states of Arkansas, Missouri, and West Virginia are no longer part of SACSCOC. In the current 11 Southern States, SACSCOC accredits 786 technical colleges, two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Of these institutions, 258 offer associate degrees, and 529 offer baccalaureate degrees or higher (SACSCOC, 2018a). Regardless of the type of institution or degree offering, every institution seeking initial membership or reaffirmation must undergo one, or in some instances, more than one institutional review by SACSCOC committees. The types of reviews conducted by SACSCOC committees are:

- Candidate Committee reviews of institutions seeking candidacy
- Accreditation Committee reviews of candidate institutions seeking initial membership

- Reaffirmation Committee reviews of member institutions seeking continued accreditation following a comprehensive review
- Special Committee reviews of member institutions seeking continued accreditation following evaluation of institutional circumstances that are accreditation related, and
- Substantive Change Committee reviews of member institutions seeking approval and continued accreditation following the review of a change of a significant modification or expansion to the institution's nature and scope. (SACSCOC, 2019a, para. 1)

SACSCOC (2019a) explains further that:

Reviews are conducted in accordance with the *Core Requirements* and Standards in the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* to provide consistent guidelines for peer reviews, representing the collective judgment of the membership on standards appropriate for the assurance of quality in higher education. (para. 1).

Each of the five institutional reviews listed above has its review guidelines and process.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, only the outcomes of “Reaffirmation Committee reviews of member institutions seeking continued accreditation” are considered.

The reaffirmation process carried by “Reaffirmation Committees” has three review stages: 1) The off-site reaffirmation review, 2) The on-site reaffirmation review, and 3) Review by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees (SACSCOC, 2019b, paras. 4-6). In the context of accreditation, “reaffirmation” is the renewal of an institution's accreditation through compliance with all the *Principles of Accreditation*.

SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation

SACSCOC publishes old and current editions of the principles of accreditation on its public website (SACSCOC, 2019a). Since 1984, there have been five revisions to the standards.

Principles Workshop Presentation (n.d.) states that all editions of the principles of accreditation undergo a full review every five years and are updated when there are significant additions from the Federal government or when there are modifications to standards related to Institutional Effectiveness (IE). Institutional effectiveness, as well as quality assurance, pervade the *Principles of Accreditation*. The importance SACSCOC places on IE is such that an entire section on IE standards, section 3.3 (SACSCOC, 2012), requires careful attention during the many stages of the review process (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 7). The notion of institutional effectiveness is of major significance to SACSCOC in that it takes central stage during considerations in accreditations decisions (*1998 Criteria*, 2000.). From its very mission statement, SACSCOC expects that all member institutions engage in continuous efforts of quality throughout academic programs and their operations (SACSCOC, 2020).

From 1984 to 2017, the principles of accreditation maintained a similar structure in wording and the number of sections and principles used in the accreditation process (*Principles Workshop Presentation*, n.d.). The first publicly available edition of the *Principles of Accreditation* was the 11th edition (*1998 Criteria*, 2000), and it remained in effect through 2003. It was the most prolonged period where there were no changes to the SACSCOC accreditation principles. Since then, only the 2012 edition remained unchanged for six years, while other editions changed with more frequency (SACSCOC, 2019a). However, in 2018, the principles undertook a significant restructuring (“Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges,” 2016) to address mandates from the Department of Education (this aspect is outside the scope of this study). Therefore, by focusing my study and data collection from 2013 to 2018, the 2012 edition of the *Principles of Accreditation* serves as a framework for

the study's analysis. Specifically, SACSCOC evaluated institutions and made accreditations decisions based on four compliance areas:

- Compliance with the Principle of Integrity
- Compliance with the Core Requirements
- Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards
- Compliance with additional Federal Requirements

These four sections detailed several standards, and institutions needed to demonstrate compliance with each of them. The first section referred to *The Principle of Integrity*, which stated:

Integrity, essential to the purpose of higher education, functions as the basic contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member and candidate institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly and openly with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its accredited and candidate institutions (SACSCOC, 2010, p. 11; SACSCOC 2012, p. 13).

The second section addressed *Core Requirements*. In this section, SACSCOC evaluated institutional-based requirements that laid out basic expectations for all institutions, including aspiring institutions. In Core Requirement 2.2, for instance, institutions needed to demonstrate that they have a governing board of at least five members who engage in policy-making for the institutions and ensure that “the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program” (SACSCOC, 2010, p. 15; SACSCOC 2012, p. 17).

The third section contained *Comprehensive Standards* that are more sensitive and therefore require closer attention from institutions:

The Comprehensive Standards are more specific to the operations of the institution, represent good practice in higher education, and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions. If an institution is judged to be significantly out of compliance with one or more of the Comprehensive Standards, its reaffirmation of accreditation may be denied (SACSCOC, 2010, p. 23; SACSCOC, 2012, p. 25)

According to *Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Principles in Decennial Reaffirmation* (2019), most of the top ten frequently cited principles belong to the *Comprehensive Standards* section. The emphasis and detail SACSCOC places on the *Comprehensive Standards* in the 2012 edition mandated institutions to demonstrate compliance in all areas supporting student learning. In a recent article, Baer (2017) recognizes that institutions across the United States are accountable for providing valid and reliable evidence of student learning. For SACSCOC, evidence of compliance needs to occur through clear, comprehensive, institution-developed narratives supported with data in fourteen subsections of the *Comprehensive Standards*.

Required subsections that institutions report on include:

- Institutional Mission
- Governance and Administration
- Institutional Effectiveness
- All Educational Programs
- Undergraduate Programs
- Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs
- Faculty
- Library and Other Learning Resources
- Student Affairs and Services

- Financial Resources
- Physical Resources
- Substantive Change Procedures and Policy
- Compliance with Other Commission Policies
- Representation of Accreditation Status

The last section of the *Principles of Accreditation* covers all the *Federal Government* requirements. Section four, *Federal Requirements*, focuses on all the policies and procedures that governed colleges and universities under SACSCOC and the U.S. Department of Education (SACSCOC, 2010, p. 37; SACSCOC, 2012, p. 39).

In the results reported on (*Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Principles in Decennial Reaffirmation*, 2019), schools appeared to fail more frequently in standards related to institutional effectiveness, educational programs (e.g., student learning outcomes), faculty qualifications, and school finances. One can observe these principles appearing at all three stages of the review process. Annual non-compliance findings further support the results at the three stages of reaffirmation reviews (SACSCOC, 2019c). The following section elaborates on the most common issues institutions face addressing these four principles.

Regional Accreditation Components

Wood (2006) presents a standard planning order that colleges and universities follow in preparation for their accreditation review. Wood writes about three stages of the accreditation process, that if implemented successfully, an institution should have a positive evaluation. During the first stage, Wood recommends that institutions develop accreditation teams, develop a budget, create a calendar of activities, participate in accreditation workshops and training, and establish an assessment committee. This stage of the planning process is crucial as it identifies

the leadership responsible for submitting a flawless self-study. In the second stage, Wood writes about developing a draft of the self-study based on evidence and documents that support the report's narrative. This stage is where schools spend the most time addressing each of the accreditation standards and supporting narratives with the appropriate documents and data. The third and final stage is dedicated to reviewing and editing the final draft of the self-study, submitting the actual self-study, participating in mock accreditation visits, and preparing for the on-site accreditation review. The three stages cover the process any institution could implement to have a successful accreditation process. It is a standard and lengthy process for all higher education institutions entering the phase of an accreditation review.

For SACSCOC institutions preparing to enter the accreditation review process, the *Principles of Accreditation* (SACSOC, 2012, pp. 5-9) provide an overview of the many components that take place before a full accreditation review. Preliminary and required preparation for accreditation by the institution consists of two components: 1) A “collective analysis and judgment by the institution’s internal constituencies” (p. 5), also known as a self-study or compliance certification and 2) A Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to “affirm a commitment to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue that the institution considers important to improving student learning outcomes and student success.” (SACSCOC, 2018c, p. 1). The rest of the accreditation process components are divided into three stages and are conducted by Reaffirmation Committees. The off-site reaffirmation and on-site reaffirmation review stages are completed by peers external to the institution (SACSOC, 2012, p. 8; SACSCOC, 2019b, paras. 4-5). The third and final stage is the review by elected members of the Commission on Colleges Board of Trustees (SACSOC, 2012, p. 9; SACSCOC, 2019b, para. 6).

Self-study. Also known as self-assessment is a written narrative documenting the institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*. Halstead (2019) defines self-study as “a comprehensive and concisely written report which documents a data-driven evaluation process” (p. 1). However, institutions must undergo a long and overwhelming process to achieve a successful report, often supported by writing teams, consultants, and experiences from other institutions (Hasbun & Rudolph, 2016). At the conclusion of this stage, an institution's self-study is a testament to the public and accreditors that the institution is accomplishing its mission, and “it has been thorough, honest, and forthright, and that the information contained in the document is truthful, accurate, and complete.” (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 7).

External peer review. In this stage of the accreditation process, external peer evaluators review the institutions' accreditation compliance with SACSCOC accreditation standards. The review is broken down into two stages –the off-site review and the on-site review (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 8). The off-site review is conducted by an external committee responsible for assessing the self-study. “At the conclusion of the review, the off-site committee prepares a separate report for the institution, recording and explaining its compliance decisions. The report is forwarded to the respective institution’s on-site committee, which makes its final determination on compliance.” (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 8). The on-site review committee is in charge of visiting the institution to conduct an evaluation at the campus level. During the on-campus visit, the committee addresses any issues of compliance that resulted from the off-site review. SACSCOC (2012) details that “the on-site committee finalizes a written report of its findings noting areas of non-compliance. The report, along with the institution’s response to areas of non-compliance, is forwarded to the Commission’s Board of Trustees for review and action on accreditation.” (p. 8).

Commission on colleges board of trustees. The third and final stage of the accreditation process culminates with reviewing the reports and recommendations made by peer evaluators. The Board's recommendation regarding an institution's accreditation is "forwarded to the Executive Council for review. The Executive Council recommends action to the full Board of Trustees, making the final decision on reaffirmation and any monitoring activities that it may require of an institution." (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 9).

Accreditation is the oldest system of accountability in higher education (Baker, 2002). As this section explores, we know that accreditation fulfills two purposes: an internal institutional self-assessment and one through an external peer evaluation. A plethora of colleges and universities voluntarily submit themselves to non-governmental association reviews to demonstrate quality standards to the government and the public.

Issues Affecting Higher Education Accreditation in the South

As a measure of educational quality, accreditation, including regional accreditation, challenges institutions to attest that they are committed to their missions (Powell, 2013). However, research shows that a comprehensive accreditation review process presents problems for institutions yearly (Baylor, 2010; Hegji, 2017; SACSCOC, 2006). Every college and university participating in a regional accreditation review begins with developing a self-study addressing a litany of accreditation standards (Halstead, 2019). Halstead (2019) notes that self-study is based on comprehensive and concise study reports supported by data and on-site evaluation processes. The complexity of higher education itself and the lack of understanding of the accreditation landscape make the self-study development a trying effort resulting in noncompliance with accreditation standards. The following subsections discuss some of the most problematic areas of higher education accreditation in the Southern region.

Institutional effectiveness. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) defines institutional effectiveness as an “on-going, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.” (2018 - *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commi*, 2017, p. 19). Similarly, Sodhi (2016) borrows a definition from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) to explain institutional effectiveness as “a concept of measuring and improving institutional performance outcomes based on organizational goals and objectives.” (p. 17). Institutional effectiveness is more than an academic term, a higher education position title, or a research field; IE is an applied discipline (Kaur & Bhalla, 2018) with direct consequences to institutions and employees who work at these institutions (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998). For practitioners and accreditors, IE is a demonstrable process of continuous institutional quality backed by sets of quantitative measures (Gellman-Danley & Martin, 2019). In IE lies the purpose of higher education, which is to equip students with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the labor market (Pasquerella, 2020). In doing so, local and federal governments and accreditors believe that American colleges and universities accomplish their very reason for their existence when demonstrating IE.

In many instances, though, institutions experience challenges demonstrating to accreditors that they have effectively accomplished their mission, academic program goals, or student services goals. Lattimore et al. (2012) approached the problem of “effectiveness” as an accountability problem. The authors argued that schools have accreditation challenges when no strategic planning is in place. A strategic plan serves as a compass for institutions and helps

maintain professional support staff, faculty, and administrators focused on specific goals and objectives (Kotler & Murphy, 1981). The goals and objectives in a strategic plan have a complex academic, institutional, or stakeholder nature (Lattimore et al., 2012). For instance, an *academic* strategic plan focuses on the process that outlines the learning outcomes, learning improvement goals, and results in an assessment cycle (Smith, 2011). According to SACSCOC (2019c), accreditation standards related to institutional effectiveness cause the most compliance problems for institutions. Therefore, to better understand the composition of IE under the SACSCOC lens, it is imperative to separate the IE standard into its parts.

Under SACSCOC's *Principles of Accreditation* (SACSCOC, 2012), the Commission provided a comprehensive list of institutional effectiveness standards that institutions needed to comply with during initial application for membership or during the reaffirmation process. The following excerpt from (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 27) shows the extend of this IE standard:

1. The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:
 - 1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
 - 1.2 administrative support services
 - 1.3 academic and student support services
 - 1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate
 - 1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate
2. The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional

constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (Quality Enhancement Plan) (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 27)

Each of the five expected outcomes identified above (1.1 to 1.5) focused on specific areas that colleges and universities normally perform on a daily basis as part of their mission and purpose. To this end, SACSCOC expected institutions to demonstrate that they participate in continuous educational quality efforts that exhibited institutional effectiveness.

In the *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* (SACS-Resourcemanual-2012, 2012), SACSCOC detailed helpful resources schools used to aid their efforts and strategies for documenting compliance with SACSCOC's *Principles of Accreditation*, including institutional effectiveness. In *SACS-Resourcemanual-2012* (2012), SACSCOC confirms that educational programs, administrative support services, academic and student support services, and research and community/public service "serve as the cornerstones for institutional effectiveness" and expects institutions to:

- Demonstrate institutional effectiveness for all its diplomas, certificates, and undergraduate and graduate educational degree programs.
- Engage in ongoing planning and assessment to ensure that for each academic program, the institution develops and assesses student learning outcomes.
- Specify the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes students are expected to attain in courses or in a program.
- Specify methods for assessing the extent to which students achieve these outcomes and are appropriate to the nature of the discipline, and consistent over time to enable the institution to evaluate cohorts of students who complete courses or a program.

- Share widely within and across programs the results of these assessments as they can affirm the institution's success at achieving its mission and can be used to inform decisions about curricular and programmatic revisions.
- Evaluate and revise at appropriate intervals program and learning outcomes and assessment methods. (pp. 47-48).

Institutional effectiveness is difficult to assess (Cameron, 1978a; SACSCOC, 2012) as there are no specific benchmarks and metrics used to evaluate its impact. Institutions have the freedom to assess IE using methods and strategies according to their resources and capacity (Cameron, 1978b) and rely on well-articulated strategic plans to track program and institutional improvement (Bryson, 2018). However, the ambiguity of the evaluation process ultimately leaves institutions in the hands of external reviewers who make accreditation decisions based on a “careful analysis and professional judgment” (SACSCOC, 2012, p. 5) of the institutions' IE efforts.

For the past several decades, IE issues have originated at the institution level due to inconsistencies in assessment criteria or interpretations of these criteria by practitioners (Cameron, 1978a). Etzioni (1964) argues that the most common forms of measuring IE in higher education are through goal setting and outcomes, though more recent research suggests that effectiveness measured solely based on outcomes and goal attainment limits development and innovation in higher education (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998; Kaur & Bhalla, 2018). Kaur and Bhalla (2018) propose a more global approach to IE by considering “student satisfaction” (p. 16) in addition to student outcomes and program goals. In a way, IE is a complex and ambiguous field where there is no control set of variables that fits all institutions (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998). After all, accreditors rely on peer evaluators' judgment and best practices to inform their

accreditation decision. SACSCOC (2012) makes its institutions aware that the best case to demonstrate IE is through comprehensive ongoing efforts consisting of student learning outcomes assessment, academic narratives supported by qualitative and quantitative data, and documented actions that move institutions closer to accomplishing their mission. The only question is, “how much effort or proof is enough?” to fair the judgment of a diverse team of IE evaluators.

Educational programs (Student Learning Outcomes). Student learning outcomes are the expected result of the student's educational experience in an academic program or course. Student learning outcomes assessment is a significant responsibility of faculty (Morin & Bellack, 2015) since faculty are the only group of experts capable of moving assessment practices forward (Kuh, et al., 2014). However, a study conducted in 2013 by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) found that accrediting agencies continue to be the main drivers of student learning-outcomes assessment practices at higher education institutions in the U.S. (Kuh et al., 2014). Accreditors weigh assessment processes and practices heavily when making accreditation decisions (Cayuso, 2015). Provezis (2010) researched the intersection of student learning outcomes and regional accreditation to understand how regional accreditation policies and practices leverage against student learning outcomes compliance. Provezis (2010) found that all seven regional accreditation agencies have similar expectations and emphasis on student learning outcomes, and according to Cayuso (2015), there is a significant relationship between inadequate assessment processes of student learning outcomes and accreditation sanctions.

Colleges and universities spend time internally to address the importance of student learning outcomes assessment. However, the perception of accreditation among some faculty

does not favor the student learning-outcomes assessment process and, in some cases, hurts an institution's efforts to stay compliant with standards of institutional effectiveness (Sodhi, 2016). Morin and Bellack (2015) stretch the importance of creating sustainable assessment processes and developing a culture of institutional effectiveness (i.e., outcomes assessment) among faculty, students, staff, and administrators. Astin (2013) suggests that institutions use a "diverse" assessment pool that allows for data collection at the program, course, and student level. Across the United States, higher education institutions create departments dedicated to institutional assessment to oversee processes and procedures designed for self-evaluation, measure student achievement, and serve as a clearinghouse. For SACSCOC, assessment of student learning outcomes is of crucial importance to maintain a citation-free accreditation review.

Faculty qualifications. An essential contributor to student learning is the faculty body (Khoury et al., 2011). For instance, SACSCOC holds faculty accountable to demonstrate that students are indeed learning as they advance through their academic programs and that measures of student learning are in place. This fact is emphasized in Section 3.3.1.1 of the *Principles of Accreditation* for institutional effectiveness (SACSCOC, 2012), that states "The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in educational programs, to include student learning outcomes." (p. 27)

To this effect, regional accreditors expect institutions to hire qualified faculty to ensure effective curriculum delivery and student assessment. The Higher Learning Commission states in its guidelines the defining characteristics of qualified faculty:

HLC's requirements related to qualified faculty seek to ensure that students have access to faculty members who are experts in the subject matter they teach and who can

communicate knowledge in that subject to their students. When an institution indicates that a faculty member is qualified by means of an offer of employment, it is asserting its confidence in the faculty member's content expertise along with the ability of the faculty member to help position students for success not only in a particular class, but also in their academic program and their careers after they have completed their program.

(Determining Qualified Faculty, 2020, p. 1).

SACSCOC has similar guidelines for its institutions. For example, in Section 3.7.1 of the principles of accreditation for faculty credentials, SACSCOC (2012) states:

The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty

(p. 30)

However, schools do not provide complete rationales to justify their faculty qualifications in many instances, thus generating unnecessary sanctions from accreditors. A sample of 75 institutions taken by SACSCOC between 2012 and 2018 showed that 99% of institutions failed to demonstrate compliance with faculty qualifications principles during the first review stage *(Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Principles in Decennial Reaffirmation, 2019)*. Even though

faculty qualifications issues resolve at the second or third review stage, it continues to create conflicts among the Southern institutions year after year, as reported by SACSCOC (*Latest Research*, n.d.).

School finances. Another major area that causes institutions to stumble during accreditation reviews is financial mismanagement (Baylor, 2010; *Paine College v. Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges*, 2018; Young, 2010). Regional accreditation is not only concerned about ensuring the quality of education for students, but it also places a good deal of accountability on institutions to demonstrate that they have the resources to support their programs and overall operations (*NWCCU 2010 Standards*, 2010). SACSCOC (2012) stipulates in Standard 2.11: “The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services” (p. 20). The relationship between college financial stability and student learning has been widely studied for decades (Harris, 1990; Liefner, 2003; Millett, 2017; Mullin, 2014; Reed & Hurd, 2016) which suggests this accreditation standard is indirectly focused on the quality of student learning and sound academic programs. Accreditors look for sufficient resources and reserves in an institution’s financial reports that suggest sustainable operations. Moreover, colleges and universities need to show that tuition and state funding are not the only sources of capital, and they can secure robust financial support through fundraising, federal and state grants.

Accountability in Higher Education

Accountability is essential in higher education; it keeps institutions aware of their actions. Suskie (2015) says that accountability is a continuous process of responsibility grounded on documentation and the use of evidence, and schools that achieve and maintain a culture of

evidence tend to be prepared during audits or evaluations. Institutions of higher education demonstrate various forms of accountability through distinct compliance procedures. Stakeholders, in return, validate, support, and recognize the institutions' educational purpose. Some of the most widespread compliance measures linked to accountability are student achievement metrics, accreditation reviews, and state and federal data reporting.

High Quality Education

For over three decades, the Federal Government has required changes in higher education in order to improve its quality to remain competitive in the global market (Marchese, 1991). Even as of 2019, the Department of Education continues to push the administration's agenda in higher education by mandating accreditors to loosen up rigid policies that constrain institutions from focusing on serving students through more innovative programming that involves all interested parties (*Secretary DeVos Finalizes Higher Education Regulations*, 2019). The increased oversight from the federal government, states, and accreditors place colleges and universities in a position of greater accountability, especially when funding ties directly to performance outcomes. In higher education, accountability is a term associated with quantitative measures of student performance (Rabovsky, 2012). Institutions are accountable to stakeholders through measurable outcomes such as student retention, graduation, job placement rates, and other measurable student achievement outcomes (McGrane, 2013). Rabovsky (2012) points out that accountability based on measurable student outcomes helps institutions continuously improve student activities and academic programming.

As colleges and universities strive to meet federal and state performance-based requirements to receive funding and sustain operations to meet the public's demands, accreditors add another layer of accountability, primarily focused on quality assurance. Lattimore et al.

(2012) comment that accreditation has the most significant impact on student learning strategies, planning, and improvement. Ferrara (2007) writes that good teaching must be “coupled” with accreditation accountability to improve the course of student learning outcomes and assessment procedures. This aspect of the accreditation review is true in accreditors' eyes as they often require documentation of assessment procedures as proof of the quality of teaching. It is clear and reasonable that agencies expect accountability from colleges and universities, especially since stakeholders, particularly students, have begun more concerned about a return on investment for their education (Baer, 2017). Taken together, accountability remains central in our educational systems as a valuable instrument to ensure quality in education (Jackson et al., 2010). What all these studies have in common is the apparent modus operandi of higher education institutions, which is to respond to mandates from high stake agencies and, in return, meet the original purpose of every American institution of higher learning, that is to prepare and train citizens to advance knowledge and skills essential to remain competitive in local, national, and global economies.

Institutions take an earnest role in preparing students for the future by continuously improving teaching and learning. However, the part external authorities play in higher education needs special attention from faculty and administrators as these authorities are the gatekeepers of funding and regional accreditation recognition (Marchese, 1991), two indispensable necessities for a college or university to keep its doors open to the public (Eaton, 2012).

Higher Education Accountability and Regional Accreditation

Accreditation has been the main driver of higher education accountability in the U.S. (Wood, 2006). Colleges and universities voluntarily participate in comprehensive self-studies to demonstrate minimum standards of educational quality (CHEA, n.d.-b), and in return,

institutions receive approval for favorable accreditation status. In the U. S., institutions are accountable to a trifecta of organizations: The U. S. Department of Education, State authorities, and accreditors. Together, these three groups structure the oversight of higher education in the country, where accreditors play a “gatekeeper” role to all the federal and state benefits (C-RAC, 2020). However, neither the federal government nor the states have centralized control over colleges and universities (Hegji, 2017).

Naturally, postsecondary education has evolved over the past decades (Brittingham, 2009; Hegji, 2017; Marchese, 1991). Colleges and universities are more complex today than in the twentieth century, in part because of federal regulatory developments that aim to increase access to higher education. As a result, there has been an increase in programs such as online education, dual credit, and early college high schools over the past two decades. Brittingham (2009) mentions that all these new changes make accreditation more difficult for institutions and evaluators. Still, accreditation is needed to keep higher education institutions accountable and deliver high-quality education to students.

According to U. S. Department of Education (2021), the purpose of regional accreditation in higher education is to:

- Assess the quality of academic programs at institutions of higher education
- Create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions
- Involve faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning
- Establish criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation (para. 9)

For institutions of higher education, preparing for an accreditation review is a long journey that can take several months or up to two years (Wood, 2006). It also requires collaboration from numerous groups at multiple stages (O'Neill, 1999). Faculty, staff, and administrators form committees that work closely throughout the self-assessment development to prepare several reports and narratives addressing the Commission's accreditation criteria (Baker, 2002; O'Neill, 1999; *Self-Evaluation*, n.d.). It is not uncommon that the entire preparation, leading up to an accreditation review, is coordinated by an accreditation liaison who keeps the institution informed on matters related to timelines, policy, and accreditation processes.

Institutional Characteristics

Successful accreditation reviews are built on extensive narratives and reports about the institution's status. The preparation of such evidence may differ among higher education institutions because institutions may have different organizational structures and resources. School size, location, sector, and Historically Black College or University (HBCU) status are among the most commonly used indicators of institutional diversity (Marsh, 2014; Urias & Wood, 2014). However, these indicators are only a subset of possible 70 institutional characteristics differentiating higher education institutions and are reported on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) website by all colleges and universities participating in federal financial aid programs.

In recent years, higher education researchers have used institutional characteristics to examine student success, compare institutions, and analyze national trends (*IPEDS Data Collection System*, n.d.; Pike & Robbins, 2020). More specifically, there is research focusing solely on institutional characteristics to explain a spectrum of student success issues. For instance, Marsh (2014) used institutional characteristics related to expenditures, and he found a

positive effect on the rate of student retention from one year to the next year at four-year colleges and universities. Conversely, Calcagno et al. (2008) did not find the same effect on student retention and graduation rates at community colleges when studying the impact of institutional expenditures on student retention and graduation rates. However, Calcagno et al. (2008) found that institutional size, the proportion of part-time faculty, and minority student groups' size negatively correlated with student degree completion at the community college level.

Within all historical and present perceptions of accountability, one value has persisted. Higher education centeredness in society is mainly seen in relation to graduates' preparation to be competitive in the labor market. Since degree attainment serves as an indicator of how an institution responds to the need to prepare its students for employment (Greene, 2021), many studies have examined student graduation rates (Allen, 1999; Bolkan et al., 2021; Eckard, 2020; Scott et al., 2006; Winters, 2018). Through the Department of Education, the federal government uses graduation rates to track postsecondary progress and guide new policies in higher education (Woodworth, 2020). Furthermore, in more recent years, student achievement metrics, such as graduation rates and completion, have played an important role at the state level; state governments began using these metrics to appropriate funds for colleges and universities (Mangan, 2013; Tandberg & Laderman, 2018).

The inclusion of institutional characteristics in the research of various higher education topics merits the attention of federal and state governments, accreditation agencies, postsecondary education leaders, and researchers. For instance, studies of equity and diversity in higher education are starting to emerge using institutional characteristics data to understand better the existing social class and racial gaps in outcomes (Flores & Park, 2013; Urias & Wood,

2014). Most recently, Burnett (2020) focused on institutional characteristics of HBCU's to demonstrate that accreditation actions significantly impact these institutions.

In conclusion, there is evidence in the higher education literature that institutional characteristics cannot be overlooked when examining an institution's capacity to accomplish its mission, be accountable to the government and the public, and fulfill accreditation requirements. While many institutional characteristics cannot be changed (e.g., location), other characteristics can improve, such as graduation rate, enrollment, or default rate. However, it will take more faculty and staff working together to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and process management (Hu & Kuh, 2002) while still meeting the institution's mission.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses compliance theory and organizational theory to design the study and understand the relationship between SACSCOC and its member institutions as they attempt to demonstrate compliance with accreditation requirements. On the one hand, the compliance theory focuses on the regulatory system that helps institutions conduct their business with the highest level of integrity (Foorhuis & Bos, 2011). On the other hand, the organizational theory helps understand how any organized group of people work under the same standards and for the same purpose (Hertz & Livingston, 1950). Though not highly used in educational research, compliance theory is useful in the field of accreditation. Compliance theory provides a set of principles that dictate the ethical behavior and activities of organizations. Similarly, organizational theory is relevant to accreditation research for its focus on the study of organizations and their members, mainly how they interact internally and externally (Winzenried et al., 2010).

In early 1960, Amitai Etzioni introduced compliance theory (Etzioni, 1961) to analyze the structure of organizations and the type of power used to control members' behavior and involvement. Since then, many other authors have applied the compliance theory to explain organizational behavior (Greenfield, 1995; Julian, 1966; Miner, 2011; Okoroma, 2007), thus suggesting the intertwining of the two frameworks. In his book, Miner (2011) borrows from Etzioni (1961) to describe compliance as a power perspective between a superior and subordinates as "An ability to influence or induce someone else to carry out the person's directives or the norms that person supports; power positions give incumbents regular access to some means of power" (Etzioni, 1961, p. 4).

The behaviors exhibited by institutions through compliance principles are complex (Etienne, 2011). For instance, since the actions towards accomplishing institutional goals and accreditation requirements are interrelated, some actions are automatic, and other actions need to be planned. Automatic actions involve habitual activities (Etienne, 2011), such as showing up to teach a class or providing satisfactory customer service. However, planned actions might require goal setting and continuous effort to meet targets, such as increasing student program completion or opening a new program. At the intersection, compliance theory and organizational theory offer principles of control in organizations. One theory focuses on principles rooted in policies and guidelines to "control" members of the organization, and the other one through principles of hierarchy that determine a structure of organizational behavior.

Compliance Theory

Etzioni (1961) introduced three types of power that organizations use to direct their members' performance. The three organizational powers are: coercive, utilitarian, and normative. Coercive power is based on the use of physical sanctions. This type of power uses fear to control

the members of the organization. It is commonly used in prisons, mental institutions, and training in the military. Utilitarian power is based on control over material resources and rewards.

Utilitarian power uses compensation or rewards to control low-level participants. Organizations that use this type of power include business firms and government agencies. Normative power is based on the dispensation and manipulation of symbolic rewards. Normative power utilizes intrinsic rewards such as job satisfaction, fulfillment in society, and employee engagement. Examples of organizations that use normative power are universities, non-profit organizations, churches, and hospitals. (Etzioni, 1961, pp. 4–5; Lunenburg, 2012).

Using compliance theory in this study, I framed SACSCOC's authority over its member institutions as one of normative power. Even though all three types of power are useful to obtain results, coercive or utilitarian power is not aligned with SACSCOC's core values of transparency, integrity, continuous quality improvement, self-regulation, student learning, and accountability (SACSCOC, 2020). Under normative power, colleges and universities abide by accreditation principles and accept them as the regulatory policy to continuing accreditation. Therefore, SACSCOC principles can be interpreted as norms that institutions and their members agree to implement to receive accreditation. Some of these norms are more challenging to implement, and this dissertation assumes that the ability to abide by these norms is in relationship with institutional characteristics.

Organizational Theory

When SACSCOC sanctions an institution due to failure to comply with some of its guidelines, it may jeopardize the entire organization. SACSCOC accreditation means that the organization (i.e., institution) and the organization's academic programs meet the minimum standards of quality (CHEA, n.d.-b). Trundle (1948) defines an *organization* as:

Departments and personnel that are to carry on the work, defining their duties and the relations that exist between departments and individuals. It is the arrangement of men's activities in the performance of work, coordinated for harmonious attainment of predetermined objectives. An organization is an affiliation between co-operating units.

(p. 51)

In the domain of higher education, organizations are the colleges and universities, and the units are the respective divisions, departments, student support services offices, and any other office part of the postsecondary institution. Following Trundle's (1948) description, personnel equate to all the professional support staff, administrators, and faculty who perform a job at the school. It also includes the 'predetermined objectives' that parallel the institution's mission statement. Taken together, organizational theory applied to higher education is the set of principles and ideas used to explain and predict the interaction between the institution and its internal and external constituencies (Birken et al., 2017), such as accreditation agencies. Manning (2017) writes that organizational theory elements are based on bureaucratic principles, and up to some extent, "bureaucratically organized institutions are more effective" in accomplishing their purpose when there is stability across the many hierarchical levels of the institution. Manning also warns of the difficulties of fully implementing organizational principles in a "democratic-style" governance and collegial structure. Therefore, as described by (Manning, 2017), organizational theory is useful in understanding the use of normative power (Etzioni, 1961) residing in SACSCOC principles that higher education institutions and their members agree to implement to receive accreditation.

Literature Gap

The literature review examined topics surrounding higher education accreditation, including issues that schools encounter as part of an accreditation review. Although accreditation actions can have severe consequences for students, faculty, staff, and the community, there is not enough research on this topic to inform higher education administrators, accreditors, and policymakers. Up until 2010, only ten papers were written about higher education accreditation in the 21st century (Ruiz, 2010). The compilation of study abstracts in Ruiz's (2010) work shows a combination of qualitative and quantitative papers containing the pros and cons of accreditation and similarities in requirements from different accrediting agencies. The quantitative research studies available about accreditation continue to be still limited today.

Moreover, no studies on accreditation have examined the relationship between the institutional characteristics of colleges and universities accredited by the SACSCOC and their compliance with SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. In other words, is there a relationship between institutional characteristics, some defined in this chapter, and an institution's accreditation actions under SACSCOC?

In conclusion, this quantitative exploratory study aims to fill this gap in the literature and is expected to establish the relationship between accreditation records of colleges and schools in the southern region and their publicly available institutional characteristics through multivariate statistical analysis of SACSCOC and IPEDS data (as described in Chapter 3). The two theories guiding the study, compliance and organizational theories, helped design the research and interpret the study findings.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter describes the steps taken to conduct my research. First, I provide an overview of the purpose of the study and research questions. Then, I describe the research design that includes information on the data sources, population, and sample, followed by an extended section discussing the proposed framework for organizing regional accreditation standards in categories. The research design continues with a presentation of study variables and statistical analyses for each research question. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing the limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine accreditation records of two-year and four-year institutions in the SACSCOC membership that underwent a comprehensive review between 2013 and 2018. The study has two main objectives: to gain an understanding of the most challenging standards of accreditation that institutions fail to meet that might contribute to an institution's undesirable sanctions and to explore the relationship between the accreditation noncompliance and institutional characteristics. I particularly examined the relationship between accreditation citations and selected institutional characteristics as available through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Four research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the most challenging accreditation standards during each level of review?

Are there any changes in noncompliance evaluation over the 3-stage review process?

RQ2: What are the accreditation standards factors obtained by dimensionality reduction, and which factors are the most challenging? Are the most challenging accreditation standards factors mapping the 2012 SACSCOC standards?

RQ3: For the selected most challenging accreditation standards factors, are there differences in the mean scores by review level and selected institutional characteristics?

RQ4: What is the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and institutional characteristics?

Research Design

Population and Sample

The population for this study was represented by all 786 institutions that are part of the SACSCOC membership (SACSCOC, 2018). Table 3.1 shows a distribution of colleges and universities by state with respect to each sector.

Table 3.1

SACSCOC Member Institutions by State and by Sector

State	Public	Private	Total
Alabama	37	14	51
Florida	42	35	77
Georgia	49	30	79
Kentucky	24	25	49
Louisiana	28	11	39
Mississippi	24	8	32
North Carolina	75	37	112
South Carolina	29	22	51
Tennessee	23	40	63
Texas	108	54	162
Virginia	40	31	71
Totals	479	307	786

The study sample includes all institutions that underwent a SACSCOC accreditation review between 2013 and 2018, except the very few private for-profit and 2-year private not-for-profit institutions. SACSCOC (2018) reported the accreditation review data on December 31, 2018, as a continuing effort to provide an overview of the Commission's activities during the year 2018. My research study's sample consists of $N = 483$ unique institutions. However, for some analyses, the sample size was slightly decreased due to missing information on institutional characteristics or incomplete data on all three review stages. For instance, the most complex multivariate analysis was based on 428 cases.

Data Sources

The data for this study originated from two sources. 1. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and 2. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Database System. To this end, anonymous data was obtained through the Office of Training and Research (OTR) at SACSCOC by following the required process (*Request for Data or Research Assistance*, 2015). The OTR provided unidentifiable institutional data on items related to the outcome for each standard of accreditation at every review level between 2013 and 2018. Due to the confidentiality of the data, OTR merged the accreditation data with the 2018 IPEDS information on institutional characteristics for each of the SACSCOC member institutions, using a unique institutional IPEDS ID. I received the merged data for the sample, with identifiers removed, in Excel files. SACSCOC required rigorous data management procedures that I describe in Appendix A. In addition, Appendix B includes the UTA IRB protocol and dissertation chair letter of support addressed to SACSCOC's research office. Appendix C includes the formal data request approval by the SACSCOC President.

The second data source consists of information from 12 surveys of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Since 1985 the Institute of Education Sciences has commissioned the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to collect aggregate data from all postsecondary institutions receiving federal financial assistance (Aliyeva et al., 2018). The NCES collects institutional characteristics every year through system surveys known as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Colleges and universities' institutional research offices submit data through 12 online surveys during the fall, winter, and spring (Saupe, 1981; *Survey Components*, n.d.). In return, the IES utilizes IPEDS data to “provide scientific evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and to share this information in formats that are useful and accessible to educators, parents, policymakers, researchers, and the public.” (*Institute of Education Sciences [IES]*, n.d.). Federal and state governments and accreditors use IPEDS as a reliable source for reporting postsecondary education trends. Many other organizations use the data from IPEDS to learn basic information about higher education institutions in order to make strategic decisions (*About IPEDS*, n.d.) or conduct comparisons between colleges and universities. All the survey items from IPEDS are publicly available and described at length in data glossary documents (<https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/VisGlossaryAll.aspx>). As indicated in this section, due to confidentiality regarding SACSCOC accreditation data, I could not extract the IPEDS data myself, but I received from ORT the required 2018 IPEDS information merged with the accreditation data.

Variables

Table 3.2 provides a description of the variables proposed for this study. The first variable represents each institution's unique identifier; this designation was essential as all the

data collected was at the institution's level. SACSCOC data included variables that described each review stage accreditation outcome (i.e., off-site level, on-site level, Board review level). At each stage, 100 items corresponding to SACSCOC principles of accreditation were evaluated and reported for each institution as meeting or not meeting the compliance requirements. The 100 items were originally grouped following SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation 2012 edition. In addition, SACSCOC data includes the total number of citations as a sum of all noncompliance items at each review stage.

Table 3.2

Study Variables

Variable	Description	Type/ Categories
Institution Number		
Confidential Number	This number is randomly assigned to each institution for research purposes. It is a SACSCOC generated confidential number.	Numerical
Reaffirmation review stages		
Review Stage	Indicator of result availability for each stage	Nominal 3-category variable: 1=off-site level, 2=on-site level, 3=Board review level
SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation 2012 edition (evaluated at all three review stages)		
Principle of integrity	Evaluates an institution's integrity in all matters related to its operation. (1 item)	Nominal
Core requirements	Evaluate an institution's conditions to operate at a foundational level. (16 items)	Derived 2-category variable
Comprehensive Standards	Evaluate specific requirements representative of good practice in higher education. Establish a level of achievement. (72 items)	(Compliance=0 or Non-Compliance=1)
Federal Requirements	Evaluate an institution's compliance with policy and procedures defined by the federal government. (11 items)	

Variable	Description	Type/ Categories
Accreditation result	Number of citations: Count of principles failed (noncompliance) during each review stage	Numerical Derived as a sum of noncompliance items
Institutional characteristics		
Type of Institution	Derived variable based on: -Control (Public, Private non-profit);-Level (4-year or 2-year institution); -Highest degree offering (Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate)	Nominal, 5-category variable: Public 2-yr Associate; Public 4-yr Doctoral; Public 4-yr Master/Baccalaureate; Private 4-yr Doctoral; Private 4-yr Master/Baccalaureate
Open Admission	Admission Policy: Describes whether the institution has open-enrollment or not open enrollment.	Nominal, 2 category variable: No/Yes
Enrollment range	Enrollment as a range: This range represents the institution's enrollment interval during the Fall semester.	Categorical, 2 category variable: Below 15,830; Above 15,830
Graduation rate	Graduation rate: This variable is the rate of First-Time in College Students from the institution who graduated within normal time.	Continuous
Tuition and Fees	Tuition range: This variable represents the tuition and required fees covering a full academic year most frequently charged to students.	Categorical, 5 category variable: Range 1 to 5.

As listed in Table 3.2, the IPEDS information employed in this study consists of five institutional characteristics: 1) type of institution that combined control, level, and highest degree offered, to eliminate redundancy since specific indicators are highly associated (e.g., 2-year institutions offer only Associate degrees); 2) admission policy, 3) enrollment range, 4) graduation rate and 5) tuition and fees range. Other IPEDS characteristics such as FTE staff, default rate, revenues, etc., were provided but not suitable for the study. All institutional characteristics of interest, except for graduation rate, corresponded to the 2018 IPEDS cohort.

Graduation rate information was taken from the 2012 cohort (4-year institutions) and 2015 cohort (less-than-4-year institutions).

Data Analysis

Table 3.3 describes the variables and statistical procedures employed to address each of the study research questions. The analysis is conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 and includes descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency tables, means), Categorical Principal Component Analysis, Mixed Repeated Measures ANOVA tests, and multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 3.3

Summary of Research Questions and Analyses

Research Question	Variables	Statistical Procedure
RQ1: What are the most challenging accreditation standards during each level of review? Are there any changes in noncompliance evaluation over the 3-stage review process?	-SACSCOC Principles -Review level	Descriptive statistics
RQ2: What are the accreditation standards factors obtained by dimensionality reduction, and which factors are the most challenging? Are the most challenging accreditation standards factors mapping the 2012 SACSCOC standards?	-Accreditation standards factors -Review level	-Categorical Principal Component Analysis -Descriptive statistics
RQ3: For the selected most challenging accreditation standards factors, are there differences in the mean scores by review level and selected institutional characteristics?	-Accreditation standards factors -Review level -Institutional characteristics	-Descriptive statistics - Mixed Repeated Measures (RM) ANOVA
RQ4: What is the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and institutional characteristics?	-Number of accreditation citations -Review level -Institutional characteristics	-ANOVA & Post hoc analysis -Multiple linear regression

To address the first research question, I used descriptive statistics to explore the data and identify the most challenging accreditation standards at each review level, as well as trends over the three review levels. Descriptive statistics were also used to provide better insight into the data to address research questions two and three.

To address the second research question, I used Categorical Principal Component Analysis to examine how correlations among accreditation standards allow combining associated standards into factors. The dimensionality reduction is necessary to organize the data, identify the meaning of the newly created factors, and further discuss their mapping with the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. Once items loading each factor are identified, I derived new variables for each accreditation standard factor as means of the corresponding items. As discussed further in Chapter 4, this approach will reduce the 100 SACSCOC accreditation items to 36 accreditation standard factors.

Research question three sought to compare the mean scores of the accreditation standard factors identified in research question two in order to find which ones are the most challenging. Although it was expected that the mean scores were higher at the off-site review level, the average values over the three stages were used to identify the accreditation factors that pose the most problems. Thus, only these most challenging factors were further examined to explore the effect of each institutional characteristic and review stage by using a series of Mixed Repeated Measures (RM) ANOVA analyses to compare mean differences between groups split by two factors: review stage (within-subjects) and institutional characteristic (between-subjects).

Finally, I explored the change over time for the total number of citations to confirm prior observations of the drop in noncompliance standards over time. Since the variability in the total number of citations is minimal at the on-site and board review levels, I conducted a multiple

linear regression analysis only at the off-site review stage to identify a combination of institutional characteristics that best predicted the outcome. Through several analyses, the last two research questions aimed to establish which college or university characteristics are associated with the most challenging accreditation standards.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. First, the data received from SACSCOC corresponded to 483 institutions of the total 786 SACSCOC member institutions. One reason for the data limitation could be that not all colleges and universities reported institutional characteristics in 2018 IPEDS, limiting the merged data. SACSCOC does not have oversight of IPEDS data and does not vet any dataset, including institutional characteristics. In addition, missing information on some variables decreased the sample size for some analyses.

Perhaps most importantly, a limitation of the study could be related to the misalignment between institutional characteristics data and the time collection of accreditation data, creating potential inconsistencies in results. On one hand, IPEDS data came from the 2018 IPEDS surveys, and on the other hand, SACSCOC data spanned six years' worth of accreditation reviews between 2013 and 2018. Thus, there was the possibility that institutions for which accreditation reviews were conducted early may have changed some characteristics by the 2018 IPEDS. To address possible discrepancies, I included only 4-year public and private non-profit institutions and 2-year public institutions in the study because they are more numerous and undergo fewer institutional changes.

Timeline

Acquiring the data for my study required several steps, which I briefly described as reflecting on my researcher experience. SACSCOC, a high-profile organization in higher

education, does not approve many substantive data research requests from graduate students (*Request for Data or Research Assistance*, 2015). As a result, the request and approval process encompassed many communications with the Commission and revisions to the data request. A complete timeline of every action or communication, from the initial email of expression of research interest to data approval and data sharing, is available in Appendix D.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine accreditation records of two-year and four-year institutions in the SACSCOC membership that underwent a review between 2013 and 2018. The study had two main objectives: to gain an understanding of the most challenging standards of accreditation that institutions fail to meet that might contribute to an institution's undesirable sanctions and to explore the relationship between accreditation noncompliance and institutional characteristics. In this chapter, I present the study findings following the research design presented in Chapter 3. First, I identified the most challenging accreditation standards and compared changes in compliance evaluation over the three-stage review process (i.e., off-site, on-site, board). Second, I attempted to reduce the dimensionality of the SACSCOC data by grouping the 100 standards into fewer accreditation factors using Principal Component Analysis techniques. Third, after identifying the most challenging accreditation factors, I conducted ANOVA analyses to compare their mean scores by review stage and each institutional characteristic. Finally, I examined the relationship between the total number of citations for noncompliant standards at the off-site review and institutional characteristics by conducting a multiple linear regression analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Before addressing each of the four research questions, this section presents a general description of the accreditation outcomes of all colleges and universities included in the sample. I also provide a descriptive analysis of their institutional characteristics available in the merged SACSCOC and IPEDS dataset and focus on those considered in this study.

SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation

The SACSCOC data included information on accreditation compliance such as 1) compliance outcome in each of the 100 Principles of Accreditation (2012 Edition), 2) review stage, and 3) accrued citations by review stage, for all institutions in the sample (N = 483). These measures consist of dichotomous variables (compliance=0 or non-compliance=1) on the 100 standards of accreditation implemented from 2013 to 2018 at each of the three review stages (see Appendix E).

Every institution's goal is to demonstrate compliance with the 100 standards of accreditation; however, data showed that was not always the case, as many colleges and universities received citations for noncompliance. Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics on the total number of noncompliance citations at each review stage of the reaffirmation process. Data clearly showed a decrease in the total number of citations across review stages. For instance, at the off-site review stage, the number of citations varied from 3 to 59, indicating that no institution was in full compliance, and some received up to 59 noncompliance citations. Institutions received an average of 17.03 citations with a median of 16.00, indicating that 50% of institutions received 16 or fewer citations, and the other 50% received more than 16 and up to 59 citations. At the on-site review stage, the number of citations varied from 0 to 13, indicating that some institutions received as many as 13 noncompliance citations. The sample had an on-site average of 2.82 citations and a median of 2.0, meaning 50% of institutions received two or fewer citations, and the other 50% received more than two and up to 13 citations. The statistics improved at the Board review stage when the range of citations varied from 0 to 10. The sample had a Board review average of .85 citations and a median of 0.00, with 61.4% of the sample had

not reported noncompliances. However, this indicated that 38.6% of the institutions did not comply with at least one accreditation standard at the final review level.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics of Noncompliance at the Three-Review Stages

Review Stage Citation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Median	% Institutions with no citations
Off-Site Citations	17.03	8.60	3	59	17.03	0%
On-Site Citations	2.82	2.58	0	13	2.00	18.4%
Board Review Citations	.85	1.53	0	10	0.00	61.4%

Institutional Characteristics

The institutional characteristics included in the statistical analyses consisted of only five variables: Type of institutions (5 categories), Admission policy (2 categories), Enrollment range (2 categories), Tuition range (5 categories), and Graduation rate (continuous variable). Other institutional characteristics mentioned in the previous chapter, such as revenue and investment data and FTE staff counts, were not considered in analyses because many institutions did not report these data on the 2018 IPEDS surveys, and the data did not add new information for answering the research questions. However, complete descriptive statistics of the 13 institutional characteristics are reported in Appendix F as a reference for further research.

Type of institutions. As previously stated in Chapter 3, The Type of Institution variable originated from combining the institutional characteristics of control, level, and highest degree offered since there were overlaps in their descriptions (e.g., 2-year public institutions offer only Associate highest degrees.) Thus, the result was a 5-category variable with all 483 institutions fitting in one unique category. From the overall sample (Table 4.2), 35.0% were public 2-year

associate institutions, 17.2% were public 4-year doctoral colleges or universities, 10.1% were public 4-year master/baccalaureate institutions, 16.1% corresponded to private 4-year doctoral institutions, and 16.8% were private 4-year master/baccalaureate institutions. Additionally, 4.8% of the institutions did not identify a sector.

It is worth noting that collectively, the percentage of public institutions in the sample equals 62.3%, and the percentage of private institutions is 32.9%. These percentages suggest that the sample contains a larger proportion of public institutions than the population. Similarly, the sample contains a smaller proportion of private institutions when compared to the population.

Table 4.2

Type of Institutions

Type of Institution	<i>N</i> = 483	%
Public 2-year Associate	169	35.0
Public 4-year Doctoral	83	17.2
Public 4-year Master/Baccalaureate	49	10.1
Private 4-year Doctoral	78	16.1
Private 4-year Master/Baccalaureate	81	16.8
Sector unknown or not available	23	4.8

Admissions policy (Open admission). Of the 483 institutions in the sample, the majority of the schools did not have an open admission policy (48.7%), while 43.3% indicated that they had an open admissions policy. Only 8.1% of the institutions did not report whether they had an admissions policy or not.

Enrollment (Enrollment range). Table 4.3 shows a distribution of five ranges for the 483 institutions to indicate small, mid-sized, and large institutions. Range 1 corresponded to institutions with student enrollment numbers from 1 to 15,829 students; range 2 corresponded to institutions with student enrollment from 15,830 to 31,660 students; range 3 contained

institutions with enrollments from 31,661 to 47,490 students; range 4 included schools with student registration from 47,491 to 63,321 and range 5 contained institutions with an enrollment of 63,322 students or more. For the purpose of this study, I combined the bottom four ranges into one for schools with 15,830 or more enrollments, and the institutions that did not report enrollment were removed from the analysis.

Table 4.3

Student Enrollment Range

Student Enrollment Range	<i>N</i> = 483	%
1 – 15,829	395	81.8
15,830 – 31,1660	47	9.7
31,1661 – 47490	12	2.5
47,491 – 633221	5	1.0
63,322 >	2	0.4
Not reported	22	4.6

Note. IPEDS defines student enrollment as the total number of men and women enrolled for credit in the fall of the 2018-2019 academic year.

Tuition and fees (Tuition range). IPEDS data included five tuition ranges based on institutions' price of attendance for full-time, first-time undergraduate students for the full academic year. From the sample of 483 institutions, 57.3% of the sample had a cost of attendance between \$1 and \$10,663 per year, 13.3% of institutions cost between \$10,664 and \$21,328 per year, 10.6% of the sample reported a cost of attendance between \$21,329 and \$31,992, and 10.5% had a cost of attendance of \$31,993 or higher per academic year. In addition, 8.3% of the cases were missing. Table 4.4 illustrates the distribution of institutions by cost of attendance range.

Table 4.4*Cost of Attendance Range*

Tuition and Fees Range	<i>N</i> = 483	%
\$1 - \$10,663	277	57.3
\$10,664 - \$21,328	64	13.3
\$21,329 - \$31,992	51	10.6
\$31,993 - \$42,657	33	6.8
\$42,658 >	18	3.7
Missing	40	8.3

Graduation rate. In this study, graduation rate was a continuous variable. As previously indicated, SACSCOC facilitated the IPEDS data; thus, the graduation rate followed the IPEDS collection process, in which graduation rate represented the number of completers within 150% of normal time to completion between the 2012 cohort (4-year institutions) and the 2015 cohort (less-than-4-year institutions). These two cohorts were represented by first-time, full-time degree or certificate-seeking students at each institution. The range of values for graduation rates is from 6% to 95%, with a mean of 41.5% and a median of 39%, indicating that 50% of institutions have graduation rates below 39%.

Research Question 1

What are the most challenging accreditation standards during each level of review?

Are there any changes in noncompliance evaluation over the 3-stage review process?

To address this research question, I used descriptive statistics to explore the frequency of noncompliance for each accreditation standard and at each review stage of the reaffirmation process. Then, I organized the 100 SACSCOC standards of accreditation from the most challenging to the least challenging (i.e., decreasing number of citations). In this section, only the top 25 most cited standards are presented; however, the frequencies of noncompliance for all 100

standards are available in Appendix G. This section also presented the change of the total number of citations over the 3-stage review process.

Off-site Review Stage

Table 4.5 shows the 25 standards of accreditation where colleges and universities in the sample received the most citations. The top three standards of accreditation that received the most citations during the off-site review were Faculty Competence with 451 citations, Educational Programs with 279 citations, and Academic and Student Support with 246.

Table 4.5

Top 25 Most Cited Noncompliant Accreditation Standards - Off-site Review Stage

Accreditation Standard	Number of Citations	% Of Institutions with Citations
3.7.1 Faculty Competence	451	93.37
3.3.1.1 I.E. Educational Programs	279	57.76
3.3.1.3 I.E. Academic and Student Support	246	50.93
3.3.1.2 I.E. Administrative Support Services	235	48.65
3.3.1.5 I.E. Community Public Service	221	45.76
2.11.1 Financial Resources	201	41.61
2.8 Faculty	199	41.20
3.4.11 Academic Program Coordination	194	40.17
3.2.14 Intellectual Property Rights	189	39.13
3.7.2 Faculty Evaluation	187	38.72
3.5.1 General Education Competencies	158	32.71
4.1 Student Achievement	144	29.81
3.2.9 Personnel Appointment	141	29.19
3.2.10 Administrative Staff Evaluations	137	28.36
3.8.3 Qualified Staff	135	27.95
2.5 Institutional Effectiveness	128	26.50
3.5.4 Terminal Degrees of Faculty	126	26.09
3.4.7 Consortia Relationships		
Contractual Agreements	125	25.88
3.11.3 Physical Facilities	123	25.47
3.13.3 Complaint Procedures	119	24.64
3.9.3 Qualified Staff	119	24.64
3.4.4 Acceptance of Academic Credit	114	23.60

Accreditation Standard	Number of Citations	% Of Institutions with Citations
3.13.1 Accreditation Decisions	113	23.40
3.2.13 Institution- related Entities	113	23.40
3.10.3 Control of Finances	106	21.95

Note. The numbering under the Accreditation Standard column corresponds with the numbering in the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* and was included on the table for reference, clarity, and organization of the data.

On-site Review Stage

Similarly, Table 4.6 displays the 25 standards of accreditation where colleges and universities received the most citations at the On-site review stage. First, I noted that the number of citations had decreased at the On-site stage. Second, the order of most challenging standards changed. Out of the 25 standards with the most citations from the Off-site stage, 36% of those standards did not appear after the On-site review. The top three standards of accreditation that received the most citations during the On-site review were: The Quality Enhancement Plan with 262 citations, Faculty Competence with 138 citations, and Educational Programs (an indicator of Institutional Effectiveness) 279 citations. Data showed that the Faculty Competence and Educational Programs standards (top concerns at the Off-site review) continue to cumulate large numbers of noncompliance citations. In addition, the Quality Enhancement Plan standards were evaluated for the first time at the On-site stage, and data showed high noncompliance.

Table 4.6*Top 25 Most Cited Noncompliant Accreditation Standards - On-site Review*

Accreditation Standard	Number of Citations	% Of Institutions with Citations
3.3.2 Quality Enhancement Plan (I.E. Indicator)	262	54.24
3.7.1 Faculty Competence	138	28.57
3.3.1.1 I.E. Educational Programs	138	28.57
3.3.1.2 I.E. Administrative Support Services	87	18.01
3.3.1.3 I.E. Academic and Student Support	86	17.81
3.3.1.5 I.E. Community Public Service	59	12.22
3.5.1 General Education Competencies	54	11.18
3.10. 1 Financial Stability	34	7.04
3.7.2 Faculty Evaluation	31	6.42
3.4.7 Consortial Relationships		
Contractual Agreements	22	4.55
2.8 Faculty	21	4.35
3.3.1.4 I.E. Research	20	4.14
3.12.1 Substantive Change	19	3.93
3.4.11 Academic Program Coordination	17	3.52
3.10.3 Control of Finances	16	3.31
2.12 Quality Enhancement Plan (Development)	16	3.31
4.1. Student Achievement	15	3.11
2.11.1 Financial Resources	14	2.90
3.8.3 Qualified Staff	14	2.90
2.5 Institutional Effectiveness	14	2.90
4.7 Title IV Program Responsibilities	13	2.69
3.5.4 Terminal Degrees of Faculty	11	2.28
2.7.3 General Education	11	2.28
3.4.6 Practices for Awarding Credit	9	1.86
4.5 Student Complaints	9	1.86

Board Review Stage

The number of citations at the Board review decreased considerably with respect to the initial Off-site review. Table 4.7 displays the 25 standards with the most citations that resulted from the Board review stage. From the initial top 25 standards with the most citations at the Off-site stage, 16 standards showed up again at the Board review stage. The top three standards of

accreditation that received the most citations after the Board review were all in the Institutional Effectiveness category: Educational Programs with 79 citations, Academic and Student Support with 35 citations, and Administrative Support Services with 34 citations.

Table 4.7

Top 25 Most Cited Noncompliant Accreditation Standards - Board Review Stage

Accreditation Standard	Number of Citations	% Of Institutions with Citations
3.3.1.1 I.E. Educational Programs	79	16.36
3.3.1.3 I.E. Academic and Student Support	35	7.25
3.3.1.2 I.E. Administrative Support Services	34	7.04
3.10. 1 Financial Stability	29	6.00
3.5.1 General Education Competencies	28	5.80
3.3.1.5 I.E. Community Public Service	25	5.18
3.7.1 Faculty Competence	23	4.76
3.3.2 Quality Enhancement Plan	20	4.14
3.13.4b Corporate	10	2.07
3.3.1.4 I.E. Research	9	1.86
3.10.3 Control of Finances	9	1.86
3.4.7 Consortial Relationships Contractual Agreements	8	1.66
2.11.1 Financial Resources	7	1.45
2.8 Faculty	5	1.04
3.2.9 Personnel Appointment	5	1.04
3.7.2 Faculty Evaluation	4	0.83
3.12.1 Substantive Change	4	0.83
3.8.3 Qualified Staff	4	0.83
3.2. 1 CEO Evaluation Selection	4	0.83
3.7. 5 Faculty Role in Governance	4	0.83
3.2.2.3 Board Policy	4	0.83
3.4.11 Academic Program Coordination	3	0.62
2.5 Institutional Effectiveness (single standard)	3	0.62
4.7 Title IV Program Responsibilities	3	0.62
3.4.4 Acceptance of Academic Credit	3	0.62

Changes Over the 3-stage Review Process

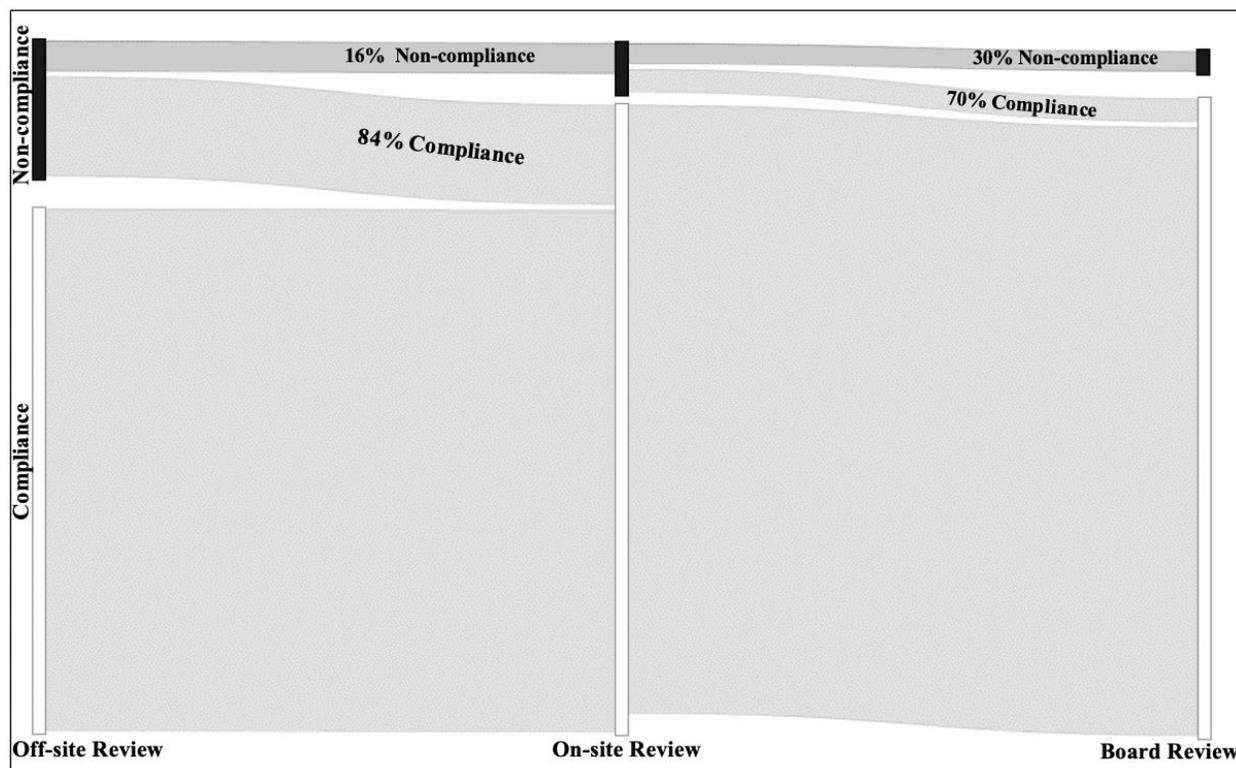
The cumulative sum of citations given to institutions in the sample reached a total of 8,089 at the Off-site stage. By the time institutions went through the On-site review, the number of cumulative citations had reduced to 1,339 and then to 405 citations after the Board review. In terms of overall noncompliance rates, the percentages dropped from 17.03% at the Off-site review to 2.82% at the On-site review and .85% at the Board review (Table 4.1).

A different way to present the change over the 3-stage review process is to evaluate the decrease in noncompliance with respect to the previous stage, as shown in the Sankey diagram², Figure 4.1. Thus, the 1,339 On-site citations represented 16% of the Off-site noncompliance. After the Board review, the cumulative number of citations had reduced to 405, equalling 30% of the On-site noncompliance. The Sankey diagram (Figure 4.1) illustrates the flow of noncompliance and compliance through the three stages of the accreditation review process. In the diagram, compliance was represented by a white vertical bar, and noncompliance was represented by a black vertical bar. One can see that over time, the white bar increases, indicating that as institutions move through the accreditation review process, schools become more compliant with the accreditation standards. Consequently, the black bar decreases, indicating that fewer institutions remain out of compliance.

² *Note.* Sankey diagrams are graph visualizations that reveal flow patterns between and through nodes (Brath & Jonker, 2015, p. 352).

Figure 4.1

The Flow of Compliance and Non-compliance Over the Three Stages of the Accreditation Review Process



Research Question 2

What are the accreditation standards factors obtained by dimensionality reduction? Are the most challenging accreditation standards factors mapping the 2012 SACSCOC standards?

In this study, each standard of accreditation is represented by a dichotomous variable that took on one of two possible inputs: Compliance (0) or noncompliance (1). These two possible scores were assigned by SACSCOC review committees based on the evaluation of each accreditation standard. Although descriptive statistics provided a useful tool to explore the noncompliance data, as shown in the previous section, I proposed to use dimensionality reduction techniques to organize the standards into a smaller number of groups for further

analysis. The data reduction was conducted through a Categorical Principal Component Analysis (CATPCA).

The exploration of SACSCOC accreditation standard data using the SPSS CATPCA led to finally clustering the 100 standards of accreditation into 36 accreditation factors. One reason for examining 36 loading factors was to mirror the classification of SACSCOC 100 accreditation standards into 36 main groups as indicated in the 12th edition of the Principles of Accreditation. Therefore, I intended to map the CATPCA factors to the SACSCOC categories.

CATPCA results. The CATPCA analysis was conducted with Oblimin Rotation and Kaiser Normalization, and results have been extracted from the Pattern Matrix (see Appendix H for the complete matrix) that displays the correlation between each accreditation standard and the 36 dimensions or factors. One standard (3.13.7 Accredited Status) was not included in the analysis because all institutions were accredited, so the variable had no variability. Other two items (3.2.14 Intellectual Property Rights and 3.13.4a Distance Education Review) were removed after conducting the analysis because they correlated with more than one factor (I looked for differences of .3 or greater among the correlations with various factors).

Table 4.8 presents the 36 factors where the first column contains the 100 SACSCOC standards of accreditation, and the second column shows the proposed factor name under which standards are aggregated. I labeled each factor based on the common meaning of the aggregated standards and according to emergent themes from the accreditation standards descriptions (SACSCOC, 2012). For instance, the naming of the *Competence and Performance* factor surfaced from the descriptions of the standards loading this factor: Faculty Competence, Personnel Appointment, Administrative Staff Evaluation, Faculty Evaluation, Academic Program Coordination, and Terminal Degrees of Faculty. In these six standards loading the

Competence and Performance factor, institutions are asked to make a case for compliance related to the abilities, skills, education, and competencies employees need to fulfill the institution's mission. I followed the same conceptual labeling approach for all remaining factors. The third column contains the dimension number assigned from the CATCPA, and it is used for ordering purposes.

Table 4.8

Categorical Principal Component Analysis Standard-Factor Alignment

100 SACSCOC Standards (DV.)	36 CATPCA Factors	CATPCA Dimensions
3.13.7 Accredited Status	NA.	removed
3.2.14 Intellectual Property Rights	NA.	removed
3.13.4a Distance Education Review	NA.	removed
3.7.1 Faculty Competence	Competence and Performance	1
3.2.9 Personnel Appointment	Competence and Performance	1
3.2.10 Administrative Staff Evaluations	Competence and Performance	1
3.7.2 Faculty Evaluation	Competence and Performance	1
3.4.11 Academic Program Coordination	Competence and Performance	1
3.5.4 Terminal Degrees of Faculty	Competence and Performance	1
2.9 Learning Resources and Services	Library and Other Learning Resources	2
3.4.12 Technology Use	Library and Other Learning Resources	2
3.8.1 Learning Information Resources	Library and Other Learning Resources	2
3.8.2 Instruction of Library Use	Library and Other Learning Resources	2
3.8.3 Qualified Staff	Library and Other Learning Resources	2
3.10.2 Financial Aid Audits	Financial Aid	3
4.7 Title IV Program Responsibilities	Financial Aid	3
3.13.4b Corporate	Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies	4
3.13.5a Branch	Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies	4
3.13.5b Separate Accreditation	Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies	4
3.13.3 Complaint Procedures	Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies	4
2.5 Institutional Effectiveness	Institutional Effectiveness	5
3.3.1.1 IE Educational Programs	Institutional Effectiveness	5
3.3.1.2 IE Administrative Support Services	Institutional Effectiveness	5
3.3.1.3 IE Academic and Student Support	Institutional Effectiveness	5

100 SACSCOC Standards (DV.)	36 CATPCA Factors	CATPCA Dimensions
3.3.1.4 IE Research	Institutional Effectiveness	5
3.3.1.5 IE Community Public Service	Institutional Effectiveness	5
3.5.1 General Education Competencies	Institutional Effectiveness	5
2.10 Student Support Services	Support Services and Programs	6
3.4.9 Academic Support Services	Support Services and Programs	6
3.6.4 Postbaccalaureate Program Requirements	Support Services and Programs	6
2.7.1 Program Length	Program Length	7
4.4 Program Length	Program Length	7
4.8.1 DE Authentication	Distance and Correspondence Education	8
4.8.2 DE Privacy	Distance and Correspondence Education	8
4.8.3 DE. Fees	Distance and Correspondence Education	8
3.2.3 Board Conflict of Interest	Governing Board	9
3.2.1 CEO Evaluation Selection	Governing Board	9
2.2 Governing Board	Governing Board	9
3.2.11 Control of Intercollegiate Athletics	Governance and Administration	10
3.2.12 Fundraising Activities	Governance and Administration	10
3.2.4 External Influence	Governance and Administration	10
2.4 Institutional Mission	Institutional Mission	11
3.1.1 Mission	Institutional Mission	11
3.13.2 Collaborative Arrangements	Institutional Mission	11
2.3 Chief Executive Officer	Organizational Control	12
3.2.2.3 Board Policy	Organizational Control	12
2.7.2 Program Content	Educational Programs	13
3.5.3 Undergraduate Program Requirements	Educational Programs	13
3.6.1 Postbaccalaureate Program Rigor	Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs	14
3.6.2 Graduate Curriculum	Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs	14
3.13.6 Public Disclosure	Public Disclosure	15
2.1 Degree Granting Authority	Degree-granting Authority	16
3.2.5 Board Dismissal	Organizational Policy and Procedures	17
3.2.13 Institution Related Entities	Organizational Policy and Procedures	17
3.2.7 Organizational Structure	Organizational Policy and Procedures	17
4.2 Program Curriculum	Student Experience Accountability	18
4.5 Student Complaints	Student Experience Accountability	18
3.7.5 Faculty Role in Governance	Miscellaneous 1	19
2.7.4 Course Work for Degrees	Miscellaneous 1	19
4.6 Recruitment Materials	Miscellaneous 1	19

100 SACSCOC Standards (DV.)	36 CATPCA Factors	CATPCA Dimensions
3.4.10 Responsibility for Curriculum	Miscellaneous 1	19
2.6 Continuous Operation	Continuous Operations	20
2.8 Faculty	Miscellaneous 2	21
1.1 Integrity	Miscellaneous 2	21
3.4.2 Continuing Education Service Programs	Miscellaneous 2	21
3.11.2 Institutional Environment	Miscellaneous 3	22
3.4.7 Consortial Relationships Contractual Agreements	Miscellaneous 3	22
3.4.3 Admissions Policies	Miscellaneous 3	22
3.4.6 Practices for Awarding Credit	Credit Hours	23
4.9 Definition of Credit Hours	Credit Hours	23
2.7.3 General Education	Credit Hours	23
3.4.1 Academic Program Approval	Commission Policies	24
3.13.1 Accreditation Decisions	Commission Policies	24
3.12.1 Substantive Change	Commission Policies	24
2.12 Quality Enhancement Plan	Quality Enhancement Plan	25
3.3.2 Quality Enhancement Plan	Quality Enhancement Plan	25
3.2.2.2 Board Fiscal Stability	Fiscal Analysis	26
3.2.2.1 Board Mission	Institutional Mission Review	27
3.5.2 Institutional Credits for a Degree	Miscellaneous 4	28
4.3 Publication of Policies	Miscellaneous 4	28
2.11.2 Physical Resources	Physical Resources	29
3.11.3 Physical Facilities	Physical Resources	29
3.2.6 Board Administration Distinction	Physical Resources	29
3.9.1 Student Rights	Miscellaneous 5	30
3.6.3 Institutional Credits for Graduate Degree	Miscellaneous 5	30
3.2.8 Qualified Administrative Academic Officers	Miscellaneous 5	30
3.9.3 Qualified Staff	Miscellaneous 5	30
3.4.4 Acceptance of Academic Credit	Credit Hour Acceptance	31
3.4.8 Noncredit to Credit	Credit Hour Acceptance	31
3.11.1 Control of Physical Resources	Financial and Physical Control	32
3.10.3 Control of Finances	Financial and Physical Control	32
3.10.4 Control of Sponsor Ed. Research External Funds	Financial and Physical Control	32
2.11.1 Financial Resources	Financial Stability	33
3.10.1 Financial Stability	Financial Stability	33
3.7.4 Academic Freedom	Faculty	34

100 SACSCOC Standards (DV.)	36 CATPCA Factors	CATPCA Dimensions
3.4.5 Academic Policies	Faculty	34
3.7.3 Faculty Development	Faculty	34
4.1 Student Achievement	Student Achievement	35
3.9.2 Student Records	Miscellaneous 6	36
3.14.1 Publication of Accreditation Status	Miscellaneous 6	36

Six CATPCA factors were labeled *Miscellaneous* because a clear theme did not emerge from their corresponding descriptions of the standards loading each factor. For example, the factor labeled *Miscellaneous 1* corresponded to the group of standards: Faculty Role in Governance, Course Work for Degrees, Recruitment Materials, and Responsibility for Curriculum. These four standards did not share much in common in their description, and therefore, I did not assign a distinctive label. None of the Miscellaneous factors appear to be significant for addressing the third research question, as shown in the next section.

Most Challenging Factors

From the 36 factors, four of the most challenging factors were selected for analysis by applying the following process: First, I calculated the grand mean (GM) for each factor by taking the average of the review stage means of noncompliant standards (Eq. 1, GM = Grand Mean, \bar{F} = Mean of all noncompliant standards in factor F)

$$GM_F = \frac{\bar{F}_{Off-site} + \bar{F}_{On-site} + \bar{F}_{Board}}{3} \quad (1)$$

Table 4.9 shows the mean scores at each review stage and the grand mean for each factor. One can observe that the mean scores decreased after each review stage. For some factors (e.g., Competence and Performance, Institutional Effectiveness, Financial Stability, Student Achievement), values were large at the Off-site review stage. However, for one factor, Quality Enhancement Plan, the largest value appears at the On-site review stage. The second step in

selecting the four most challenging factors was identifying the four largest grand means. Table 4.9 identifies the four grand means in bold font representing the most challenging factors (i.e., grand means greater than 0.1).

Table 4.9

Means and Grand Means for all Factors at the Three Review Stages

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Competence and Performance	Off-Site	475	0.4337	0.2162
	On-Site	474	0.0749	0.1076
	Board	474	0.0137	0.0552
	Total	1423	0.1743	0.2341
Library and Other Learning Resources	Off-Site	475	0.1975	0.2630
	On-Site	474	0.0114	0.0548
	Board	474	0.0021	0.0205
	Total	1423	0.0704	0.1797
Financial Aid	Off-Site	475	0.1705	0.3254
	On-Site	474	0.0158	0.0876
	Board	474	0.0042	0.0458
	Total	1423	0.0636	0.2105
Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies	Off-Site	475	0.1000	0.1801
	On-Site	474	0.0053	0.0360
	Board	474	0.0053	0.0360
	Total	1423	0.0369	0.1169
Institutional Effectiveness	Off-Site	475	0.4066	0.2906
	On-Site	474	0.1380	0.2060
	Board	474	0.0642	0.1426
	Total	1423	0.2031	0.2659

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Support Services and Programs	Off-Site	475	0.0807	0.1819
	On-Site	474	0.0042	0.0431
	Board	474	0.0014	0.0216
	Total	1423	0.0288	0.1147
Program Length	Off-Site	475	0.0663	0.2062
	On-Site	474	0.0084	0.0792
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0253	0.1315
Distance and Correspondence Education	Off-Site	475	0.0870	0.1910
	On-Site	474	0.0049	0.0403
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0307	0.1196
Governing Board	Off-Site	475	0.1698	0.2500
	On-Site	474	0.0056	0.0430
	Board	474	0.0028	0.0305
	Total	1423	0.0595	0.1669
Governance and Administration	Off-Site	475	0.1158	0.2228
	On-Site	474	0.0056	0.0430
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0405	0.1414
Institutional Mission	Off-Site	475	0.1242	0.2105
	On-Site	474	0.0042	0.0529
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0429	0.1379
Organizational Control	Off-Site	475	0.0295	0.1265
	On-Site	474	0.0021	0.0324
	Board	474	0.0074	0.0826
	Total	1423	0.0130	0.0900

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educational Programs	Off-Site	475	0.0558	0.1824
	On-Site	474	0.0063	0.0560
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0211	0.1137
Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs	Off-Site	475	0.0695	0.2090
	On-Site	474	0.0021	0.0324
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0242	0.1269
Public Disclosure	Off-Site	475	0.0021	0.0459
	On-Site	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0007	0.0265
Degree-granting Authority	Off-Site	475	0.0211	0.1437
	On-Site	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0070	0.0836
Organizational Policy and Procedures	Off-Site	475	0.1698	0.2222
	On-Site	474	0.0098	0.0565
	Board	474	0.0021	0.0265
	Total	1423	0.0607	0.1541
Student Experience Accountability	Off-Site	475	0.0958	0.2099
	On-Site	474	0.0105	0.0719
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0358	0.1357
Miscellaneous 1	Off-Site	475	0.1053	0.1837
	On-Site	474	0.0042	0.0322
	Board	474	0.0037	0.0413
	Total	1423	0.0378	0.1202

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Continuous Operations	Off-Site	475	0.0042	0.0648
	On-Site	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0014	0.0375
Miscellaneous 2	Off-Site	475	0.1488	0.1808
	On-Site	474	0.0155	0.0735
	Board	474	0.0042	0.0373
	Total	1423	0.0562	0.1322
Miscellaneous 3	Off-Site	475	0.1628	0.2295
	On-Site	474	0.0169	0.0732
	Board	474	0.0056	0.0430
	Total	1423	0.0618	0.1584
Credit Hours	Off-Site	475	0.1867	0.2760
	On-Site	474	0.0183	0.0819
	Board	474	0.0007	0.0153
	Total	1423	0.0686	0.1864
Commission Policies	Off-Site	475	0.1881	0.2473
	On-Site	474	0.0176	0.0746
	Board	474	0.0049	0.0403
	Total	1423	0.0703	0.1725
Quality Enhancement Plan	Off-Site	475	0.0011	0.0229
	On-Site	474	0.2932	0.2749
	Board	474	0.0211	0.1006
	Total	1423	0.1051	0.2155
Fiscal Analysis	Off-Site	475	0.0337	0.1806
	On-Site	474	0.0021	0.0459
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0119	0.1087

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Institutional Mission Review	Off-Site	475	0.0379	0.1911
	On-Site	474	0.0021	0.0459
	Board	474	0.0000	0.0000
	Total	1423	0.0134	0.1148
Miscellaneous 4	Off-Site	475	0.1011	0.2062
	On-Site	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0344	0.1294
Physical Resources	Off-Site	475	0.1733	0.2724
	On-Site	474	0.0035	0.0341
	Board	474	0.0021	0.0265
	Total	1423	0.0597	0.1784
Miscellaneous 5	Off-Site	475	0.1389	0.2000
	On-Site	474	0.0084	0.0452
	Board	474	0.0021	0.0229
	Total	1423	0.0499	0.1348
Credit Hour Acceptance	Off-Site	475	0.1947	0.3089
	On-Site	474	0.0095	0.0683
	Board	474	0.0042	0.0458
	Total	1423	0.0696	0.2047
Financial and Physical Control	Off-Site	475	0.2000	0.2881
	On-Site	474	0.0190	0.0913
	Board	474	0.0091	0.0625
	Total	1423	0.0761	0.1986
Financial Stability	Off-Site	475	0.3105	0.3541
	On-Site	474	0.0506	0.1827
	Board	474	0.0348	0.1430
	Total	1423	0.1321	0.2752

Factors	Review Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Faculty	Off-Site	475	0.1235	0.2137
	On-Site	474	0.0056	0.0430
	Board	474	0.0014	0.0216
	Total	1423	0.0436	0.1386
Student Achievement	Off-Site	475	0.3032	0.4601
	On-Site	474	0.0316	0.1752
	Board	474	0.0042	0.0649
	Total	1423	0.1131	0.3169
Miscellaneous 6	Off-Site	475	0.1284	0.2564
	On-Site	474	0.0053	0.0511
	Board	474	0.0011	0.0230
	Total	1423	0.0450	0.1627

Note. The sample size at the On-Site and Board reviews was adjusted to 474 due to missing compliance records of one institution.

The reduction from 100 items to 36 factors allowed me to classify and extract four heavily cited accreditation standard factors from Table 4.9. These factors were:

1. Institutional Effectiveness
2. Competence and Performance
3. Financial Stability
4. Student Achievement

Table 4.10 shows the four extracted factors with corresponding means at each review stage and the grand mean to sum up these results. Again, one can observe that the decrease in means dropped rapidly by the second and third review levels. Additionally, these four factors had the largest grand means of all 36 factors, with the Institutional Effectiveness factor leading the

chart with a value of 0.2031, followed by the Competence and Performance factor with a grand mean of 0.1743. The Financial Stability and Student Achievement factors had values of 0.1321 and 0.1131, respectively. These four areas of evaluation proved to be the most challenging for the SACSCOC membership between 2013 and 2018.

Table 4.10

Means for the Top Four Factors at the Three Review Stages

Factor	Review Stage Mean			GM
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Institutional Effectiveness	0.4066	0.1380	0.0642	0.2031
Competence and Performance	0.4337	0.0749	0.0137	0.1743
Financial Stability	0.3105	0.0506	0.0348	0.1321
Student Achievement	0.3032	0.0316	0.0042	0.1131

Factors Mapping

In total, 13 factors resulting from the CATPCA had a one-to-one mapping with 13 subsections of the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. I conducted the mapping by comparing the standards under each subsection with the standards grouped by the CATPCA process. The 13 mappings are:

- Continuous Operations
- Degree-granting Authority
- Distance and Correspondence Education
- Financial and Physical Control
- Financial Stability
- Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs
- Institutional Effectiveness

- Library and Other Learning Resources
- Organizational Policy and Procedures
- Program Length
- Quality Enhancement Plan
- Responsibility for Compliance with Other Commission Policies
- Student Achievement

The remaining 23 factors did not clearly align with the rest of the 23 subsections of the *Principles of Accreditation*. I arrived at this conclusion after noting that the 23 factors contained standards from many other subsections, which violated the desired bijection.

Research Question 3

For the selected most challenging accreditation standards factors, are there differences in the mean scores by review level and selected institutional characteristics?

Four categorical institutional characteristics are considered in the analysis: type of institution, admission policy, enrollment range, and tuition range. A series of Mixed Repeated Measures (RM) ANOVA³ were conducted to examine the effects of review level (within-subjects effect) and institutional characteristics (between-subjects effect) on the mean scores of each of the four most challenging accreditation standards factors (i.e., institutional effectiveness, competence and performance, financial stability, and student achievement) that describe the incidence of noncompliance in the SACSCOC membership. Each Mixed RM ANOVA analysis provides two main effects and one interaction effect of the *review stage* and the institutional factor.

³ Friedman's test and Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA did not show different results compared to those obtained with parametric tests. However, in order to test the interaction (within and between subjects) the parametric mixed Repeated Measures ANOVA was used.

The tables in this section present the mean scores of the accreditation standard factors at each review stage and the results of the mixed RM ANOVA. As a reminder, *type of institution* is a 5-category variable (public 2-year associate, public 4-year doctoral, public 4-year masters/baccalaureate, private 4-year doctoral, private 4-year master/baccalaureate), *admission policy* is 2-category variable (yes/no), *enrollment range* is a 2-category variable (below 15,830 and above 15,830), and *tuition range* is a 5-category variable (range 1: \$1 - \$10,663, range 2: \$10,664 - \$21,328, range 3: \$31,993 - \$42,657, range 4: \$31,993 - \$42,657, range 5: \$42,658 or more). The second independent variable included in each analysis is the *review stage*, a 3-category variable (off-site, on-site, board) that indicates changes in noncompliance over time.

Institutional Effectiveness Factor

Four mixed RM ANOVA were conducted to examine whether there was a statistically significant effect of review stage on the Institutional Effectiveness factor and whether there was a significant effect of each selected institutional characteristic on the Institutional Effectiveness factor, and a possible interaction effect between review stage and each institutional characteristic. Descriptive statistics and mixed RM ANOVA main effects and interaction effects are reported in Table 4.11 and further discussed in this section.

Table 4.11

Mean Scores and Mixed RM ANOVA for the Institutional Effectiveness Factor by Institutional Characteristics and Review Stage

Institutional Characteristics	Means of Noncompliance Scores by Review Stage			Mixed RM ANOVA Tests
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Type				
Public 2-yr Associate	.355	.126	.056	Review: F(2, 433)=305.041, $p < .001$
Public 4-yr Doctoral	.443	.161	.074	Type: F(4, 434)=1.674, $p = .155$
Public 4-yr Master/Bacc	.420	.140	.090	Review*Type:
Private 4-yr Doctoral	.474	.153	.071	F(8, 866)=1.352, $p = .214$
Private 4-yr Master/Bacc	.388	.136	.060	
Open Admission				Review: F(2, 443)=337.403, $p < .001$
No	.430	.144	.067	Adm: F(1, 444)=1.925, $p = .166$
Yes	.373	.135	.063	Review*Adm: F(2, 443)=2.181, $p = .114$
Enrollment Range				Review: F(2, 443)=155.860, $p < .001$
Below 15,830	.410	.141	.069	Enroll: F(1, 444)=1.020, $p = .313$
Above or 15,830	.371	.131	.043	Review*Enroll: F(2, 443)=.545, $p = .580$
Tuition Range				
Range 1	.390	.140	.069	Review: F(2, 422)=154.037, $p < .001$
Range 2	.403	.134	.055	Tuition:F(4, 423)=.354, $p = .841$
Range 3	.445	.154	.073	Review*Tuition:
Range 4	.385	.130	.069	F(8, 844)=.345, $p = .948$
Range 5	.402	.098	.009	

Type of institution. There was a significant difference across review stage, $F(2, 433) = 305.041, p < .001$, indicating that there was a significant effect of review stage on the Institutional Effectiveness Factor mean scores. There was a lack of statistical significance for type of institution on the Institutional Effectiveness Factor mean scores $F(4, 434) = 1.674, p = .155$, indicating that mean scores are comparable for all types of institutions. Similarly, there was no interaction effect $F(8, 866) = 1.352, p = .214$, which suggests the decrease in scores is similar for all types of institutions.

Open admission. Similar results were obtained when examining the effect of review type, admission policy, and their interaction on the Institutional Effectiveness Factor. The main effect for review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443) = 337.403, p < .001$, indicating a significant difference between the scores reported at the off-site, on-site, and board review stages. The test of between-subjects effect for open admission yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 444) = 1.925, p = .166$, indicating no statistical significance for admission policy, although institutions with open admission reported lower Institutional Effectiveness scores at the off-site stage. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2, 443) = 2.181, p = .114$, indicating the decrease in scores is similar from one review stage to another for both admission policies.

Enrollment range. Results are similar when comparing the mean scores of Institutional Effectiveness by review stage and enrollment range. The main effect for review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443) = 155.860, p < .001$, indicating a significant difference across the off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect for enrollment range produced an F ratio of $F(1, 444) = 1.020, p = .313$, indicating no significant effect, although larger institutions reported lower Institutional Effectiveness scores than smaller institutions. The interaction of review stage and enrollment range was not significant, $F(2, 443) = .545, p = .580$, indicating that the decrease in scores is similar from one review stage to another for small and large institutions.

Tuition range. The main effect for review stage was the only statistically significant result with an F ratio of $F(2, 422) = 154.037, p < .001$. Neither the main effect for tuition range, $F(4, 423) = .354, p = .841$, nor the interaction effect between review stage and tuition range, $F(8, 844) = .345, p = .948$, were statistically significant.

Competence and Performance Factor

A series of mixed RM ANOVA were conducted to examine the effects of review stage, each of the institutional characteristics, and their interaction on the Competence and Performance Factor mean scores. Most results were statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level (and some at the 0.1 level). Table 4.12 displays descriptive statistics and the mixed RM ANOVA test results for main effects and interactions effects.

Table 4.12

Mean Scores and Mixed RM ANOVA for the Competence and Performance Factor by Institutional Characteristics and Review Stage

Institutional Characteristics	Means of Noncompliance Scores by Review Stage			Mixed RM ANOVA Tests
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Type				
Public 2-yr Associate	.378	.080	.015	Review: $F(2, 433)=804.025, p<.001$
Public 4-yr Doctoral	.472	.065	.009	Type: $F(4, 434)=2.055, p=.086$
Public 4-yr Master/Bacc	.442	.095	.010	Review*Type:
Private 4-yr Doctoral	.466	.075	.016	$F(8, 866)=3.297, p=.001$
Private 4-yr Master/Bacc	.468	.066	.019	
Open Admission				Review: $F(2, 443)=837.503, p<.001$
No	.457	.074	.016	Adm: $F(1, 444)=3.133, p=.077$
Yes	.405	.082	.012	Review*Adm:
				$F(2, 443)=4.395, p=.013$
Enrollment Range				Review: $F(2, 443)=411.789, p<.001$
Below 15,830	.428	.077	.012	Enroll: $F(1, 444)=2.708, p=.101$
Above or 15,830	.472	.081	.028	Review*Enroll:
				$F(2, 443)=1.091, p=.337$
Tuition Range				
Range 1	.417	.082	.013	Review: $F(2, 422)=389.109, p<.001$
Range 2	.476	.078	.016	Tuition: $F(4, 423)=1.305, p=.267$
Range 3	.490	.072	.029	Review*Tuition:
Range 4	.424	.076	.010	$F(8, 844)=1.326, p=.226$
Range 5	.469	.083	.010	

Type of institution. The main effect for the review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 433) = 804.025, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the off-site review, on-site review, and

board review stages. The main effect for type of institution yielded an F ratio of $F(4,434) = 2.055, p=.086$, indicating a small significant difference at the .1 level on Competence and Performance scores by type of institution, with the 2-year public institutions scoring the least, and 4-year institutions scoring comparable higher at the off-site review stage. The interaction effect was statistically significant, $F(8, 866)=3.297, p=.001$, indicating that the drop in the Competence and Performance scores across review stage was not the same for all institutions.

Open admission. The main effect of review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443) = 837.503, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the scores reported at off-site review, on-site review, and board review. The main effect of open admission yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 444) = 3.133, p=.077$, indicating a small significant difference at the .1 level between institutions with and without an open admission policy, with institutions without an open admission policy reporting slightly lower Competence and Performance scores at the off-site. The interaction between review type and admission policy was statistically significant, $F(2,443)=4.395, p=.013$, indicating that institutions without an open admission policy had a steeper decrease in the scores.

Enrollment range. When conducting the RM ANOVA test for review stage and enrollment range, only the main effect of the review stage was statistically significant with an F ratio $F(2, 443) = 411,789, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference of review type on the Competence and Performance Factor. The main effect of enrollment range produced an F ratio of $F(1, 444) = 2.708, p=.101$, indicating no significant effect of large or smaller institutions on the Competence and Performance noncompliance scores. The lack of interaction between review type and enrollment range, $F(2, 443)=1.091, p=.337$, indicates that the drop in scores is comparable for institutions of all sizes.

Tuition range. The main effect for the review stage generated an F ratio $F(2,422)=389.109, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the mean scores for the off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect for tuition range yielded an F ratio of $F(4,423)=1.305, p=.267$, indicating no significant effect on the Competence and Performance scores. The interaction effect was not significant either, $F(8, 844)=1.326, p=.226$.

Financial Stability Factor

A series of four mixed RM ANOVA were conducted to examine the effects of review stage and each of the four institutional characteristics on the Financial Stability noncompliance scores. Table 4.13 shows that almost all effects were statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level except for some tests involving enrollment range and tuition range.

Table 4.13

Mean Scores and Mixed RM ANOVA for the Financial Stability Factor by Institutional Characteristics and Review Stage

Institutional Characteristics	Means of Noncompliance Scores by Review Stage			Mixed RM ANOVA Tests
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Type				
Public 2-yr Associate	.250	.022	.012	Review: $F(2, 433)=137.442, p<.001$
Public 4-yr Doctoral	.442	.033	.013	Type: $F(4, 434)=4.525, p=.001$
Public 4-yr Master/Bacc	.327	.031	.010	Review*Type:
Private 4-yr Doctoral	.267	.055	.041	$F(8, 866)=3.272, p=.001$
Private 4-yr Master/Bacc	.321	.141	.109	
Open Admission				Review: $F(2, 443)=143.565, p<.001$
No	.369	.076	.051	Adm: $F(1, 444)=19.275, p<.001$
Yes	.243	.020	.012	Review*Adm:
				$F(2, 443)=4.355, p=.013$
Enrollment Range				Review: $F(2, 443)=87.408, p<.001$
Below 15,830	.304	.058	.039	Enroll: $F(1, 444)=.332, p=.565$
Above or 15,830	.358	.000	.000	Review*Enroll:
				$F(2, 443)=3.228, p=.041$

Institutional Characteristics	Means of Noncompliance Scores by Review Stage			Mixed RM ANOVA Tests
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Tuition Range				
Range 1	.306	.030	.015	Review: $F(2, 422)=44.971, p<.001$
Range 2	.347	.065	.048	Tuition: $F(4, 423)=1.688, p=.152$
Range 3	.284	.108	.078	Review*Tuition:
Range 4	.288	.091	.091	$F(8, 844)=.948, p=.476$
Range 5	.188	.000	.000	

Type of institution. The main effect of the review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2,433)=137.442, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference between the mean scores for the three review stages. The main effect of type of institution yielded an F ratio of $F(4,434)=4.525, p=.001$, indicating a significant difference in Financial Stability scores by institution type, with 4-year public institutions offering up to doctoral level degrees reporting the largest noncompliance score at the Off-site review and the 2-year public institutions the least scores. However, the 4-year private institutions offering bachelor or master degrees have the highest noncompliance scores at the On-site and Board review. The interaction effect was significant, $F(8, 866)=3.272, p=.001$, suggesting the decrease in scores over time (i.e., review stage) is not comparable for all institution types.

Open admission. Similar results were obtained when comparing the mean scores by review stage and admission policy. The main effect of review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443)=143.565, p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the scores reported at the off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect of open admission yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 444)=19.275, p<.001$, with institutions with an open admission policy reporting lower Financial Stability scores than those institutions without an open admission policy at all review levels. The interaction effect between review type and admission policy was significant, $F(2, 443)=4.355, p=.013$, showing the decrease in scores was not the same for the two groups.

Enrollment range. The main effect of review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443)=87.408$, $p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the mean scores for the off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect for enrollment range yielded an F ratio of $F(1, 444)=.332$, $p=.565$, indicating there are no significant differences in Financial Stability scores between large and small institutions. The interaction effect produced an F ratio of $F(2, 443)=3.228$, $p=.041$, indicating a significant effect, with larger institutions showing a steeper decrease in the Financial Stability scores than smaller institutions.

Tuition range. The main effect of review stage indicates that there is a significant effect of review stage on the Financial Stability Factor with an F ratio $F(2, 422)=44.971$, $p<.001$. There is no statistical significant effect of the tuition range on the Financial Stability Factor, $F(4, 423)=1.688$, $p=.152$. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(8, 844)=.948$, $p=.476$.

Student Achievement Factor

Similar to previous analyses, I conducted four mixed RM ANOVA to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in the Student Achievement Factor mean scores of noncompliance by review stage and each of the four institutional characteristics. Almost all effects were statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level, with a few exceptions. Table 4.14 displays the mean scores and the mixed RM ANOVA test results for the Student Achievement Factor.

Table 4.14*Mean Scores and Mixed RM ANOVA Tests for Student Achievement by Institutional**Characteristics and Review Stage*

Institutional Characteristics	Means of Noncompliance Scores by Review Stage			Mixed RM ANOVA Tests
	Off-site	On-site	Board	
Type				
Public 2-yr Associate	.191	.019	.000	Review: $F(2, 433)=99.309, p< .001$
Public 4-yr Doctoral	.273	.013	.000	Type: $F(4, 434)=5.382, p< .001$
Public 4-yr Master/Bacc	.347	.020	.000	Review*Type:
Private 4-yr Doctoral	.370	.041	.014	$F(8, 866)=2.803, p=.005$
Private 4-yr Master/Bacc	.462	.051	.000	
Open Admission				Review: $F(2, 443)=91.810, p<.001$
No	.336	.029	.004	Adm: $F(1, 444)=1.932, p=.165$
Yes	.262	.030	.005	Review*Adm: $F(2, 443)=1.541, p=.215$
Enrollment Range				Review: $F(2, 443)=31.088, p<.001$
Below 15,830	.321	.034	.005	Enroll: $F(1, 444)=5.545, p=.019$
Above or 15,830	.183	.000	.000	Review*Enroll: $F(2, 443)=2.604, p=.075$
Tuition Range				
Range 1	.244	.023	.004	Review: $F(2, 422)=59.068, p<.001$
Range 2	.452	.065	.016	Tuition: $F(4, 423)=3.650, p=.006$
Range 3	.353	.059	.000	Review*Tuition:
Range 4	.455	.000	.000	$F(8, 844)=2.399, p=.015$
Range 5	.313	.000	.000	

Type of institution. There was a significant difference across the three review stages, $F(2, 433)=99.309, p< .001$, indicating that all institutions became more compliant with Student Achievement requirements by the third review stage. The main effect for type of institution on the Student Achievement Factor yielded an F ratio of $F(4, 434)=5.382, p< .001$, indicating a significant difference in Student Achievement scores by type of institution, with 2-year public institutions scoring the least and 4-year private schools offering up to masters or baccalaureate level degrees scoring the highest. The interaction between review stage and type of institution

was significant, $F(8, 866)=2.803$, $p=.005$, indicating the decrease in Student Achievement noncompliance scores was different by the type of institution.

Open admission. The main effect of review stage returned an F ratio of $F(2,443)=91.810$, $p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect of open admission was not significant, $F(1, 444)=1.932$, $p=.165$, indicating Student Achievement scores were comparable for both admission policies. The interaction effect between review stage and admission policy showed no statistically significant difference, $F(2, 443)=1.541$, $p=.215$, indicating the decrease in Student Achievement scores were the same for the two types of admission policies.

Enrollment range. The main effect for review stage yielded an F ratio $F(2, 443)=31.088$, $p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the three review stages. The main effect for enrollment range produced an F ratio of $F(1, 444)=5.545$, $p=.019$, indicating a significant effect with larger institutions reporting lower Student Achievement scores than smaller institutions. The interaction effect between review stage and enrollment range had a small significant difference at the .1 level, $F(2, 443)=2.604$, $p=.075$, indicating that the decrease in Student Achievement noncompliance scores was slightly different for the two groups.

Tuition range. The Mixed RM ANOVA tests indicated significant effects of the review stage and tuition range on the Student Achievement scores. The main effect for the review stage returned an F ratio $F(2, 422)=59.068$, $p<.001$, indicating a significant difference across the off-site, on-site, and board reviews. The main effect for tuition range yielded an F ratio of $F(4, 423)=3.650$, $p=.006$, indicating that there was a significant difference between Student Achievement scores by tuition range, with low tuition institutions showing the least noncompliance score compared to medium and large tuition institutions. The interaction between review stage and

tuition range produced an F ratio of $F(8, 844)=2.399$, $p=.015$, indicating that the decrease in noncompliance scores was different for the five tuition ranges.

Overall, the within-subjects and between-subjects main effects and the interaction effects were conducted only for the four most challenging factors Institutional Effectiveness, Competence and Performance, Financial Stability, and Student Achievement. The remaining 32 accreditation standard factors did not present much variability in the noncompliance scores, and therefore the effects of institutional characteristics could not be captured. The significance of the within-subjects effects of review stage (change over time) on all accreditation factors presented in this section were not surprising because the overall noncompliance scores decreased rapidly, particularly from the off-site stage to the on-site review stage, regardless of the institutional characteristic of the school.

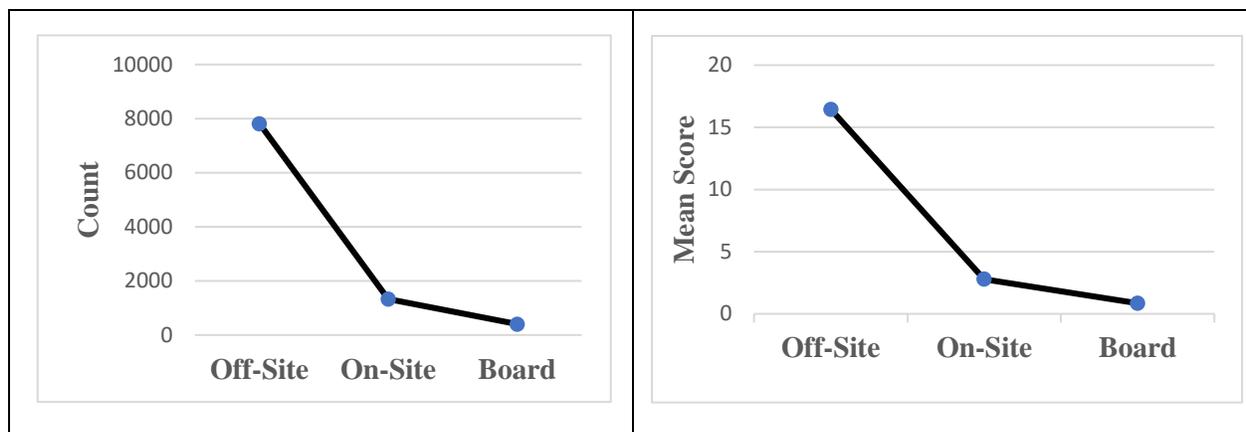
Research Question 4

What is the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and institutional characteristics?

The effect of the review stage shown in the previous section is also observed for the overall noncompliance score. Upon comparing the mean scores of noncompliance (i.e., 97 accreditation standards previously included in the analyses), an ANOVA test shows a significant difference between the means for the three review stages, $F(2,1420) = 1318.90$, $p < .001$. A Post hoc analysis using the Fisher's Least Significance Difference criterion, indicated significant differences among all three mean scores: Off-site stage ($M = 16.45$, $SD = 8.32$), On-site stage ($M = 2.78$, $SD 2.54$), and the Board stage ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 1.51$). Figure 4.2 illustrates the drop in the total number of citations and the mean scores of noncompliance from one review stage to the next one.

Figure 4.2

Counts and Mean Scores of Accreditation Citations at each Review Stage



Regression Model

Finally, I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relative effect of all institutional characteristics on an indicator of noncompliance: the total number of citations at the Off-site review stage. Since On-site and Board review scores were relatively low and presented less variability, no significant model was expected, so the analysis was limited to the off-site stage. I ran a multiple linear regression for the total sum of citations (the 97 standards of accreditation used in the previous analysis) using five independent variables: Type of Institution, Open Admission, Enrollment Range, Tuition Range, and Graduation Rate. To conduct the linear regression, I created dummy variables for type of institution (with Public 2-year Associate as reference category) and for tuition range (with Range 1 as reference category). For the two dichotomous variables, the reference category is No open admission and Enrollment below 15,830 (small size institutions). Graduation rate is a continuous variable.

The assumptions for multiple linear regression were fulfilled (e.g., multicollinearity of independent variables, normality of residuals). However, results showed a very weak although statistically significant model ($R^2_{adj}=.053$; $F(11, 416) = 3.182$, $p < .001$). The model, including

the five institutional characteristics, explains only 5.3% in the outcome (total number of accreditation citations). Model coefficients are presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

Regression Model Off-Site Review

	Unstandardized Coeff.		Standardized Coeff β	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	15.003	2.104		7.130	0.000
Public 4-yr Doc	5.106	2.172	0.239	2.351	0.019
Public 4-yr BachMaster	4.951	1.540	0.189	3.215	0.001
Private 4-yr Doc	8.835	2.365	0.388	3.736	0.000
Private 4-yr BachMaster	7.966	2.176	0.370	3.661	0.000
Open admission	1.749	1.770	0.107	0.988	0.324
Enrollment (above 15830)	0.081	1.277	0.003	0.063	0.950
Range 2 (up to \$10,664)	-0.870	1.865	-0.036	-0.466	0.641
Range 3 (up to \$21,329)	-1.453	2.483	-0.058	-0.585	0.559
Range 4 (up to \$31,993)	-2.366	2.808	-0.077	-0.842	0.400
Range 5 (up to \$42,658)	-2.593	3.415	-0.062	-0.759	0.448
Graduation rate	-0.081	0.032	-0.194	-2.559	0.011

Note. Ref category: Public 2-yr Associate; No open admission; Enrollment below 15830;

Tuition range 1.

The model shows a strong effect on the total number of citations at the off-site review stage by type of institution. The corresponding standardized coefficients are among the largest in the model, and all are statistically significant at the .05 level. The positive and large values of the unstandardized coefficients indicate that compared to Public 2-yr institutions (offering Associate degrees), all 4-year institutions accumulate at the off-site stage a much larger number of citations (e.g., a Private 4-yr institution offering Doctoral degrees reported on average about nine citations

more than a Public 2-yr institution). Thus, in general, private institutions cumulate more citations than public institutions.

The next significant effect (based on standardized coefficients) is produced by the variable Graduation rate ($\beta = -.194$). A unit increase in the graduation rate decreases the number of citations by .08 points. No other variable had statistically significant effects on the model. However, Open admission contributes to an increase in the number of citations. On the other hand, higher tuitions lead to a decrease in the number of citations.

Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of the study. The chapter began by outlining the sample, including standards of accreditation citations and profile characteristics. There were five characteristics selected for this study and all 100 standards of accreditation from SACSCOC. The first two research questions focused on exploring the accreditation data and reducing the information to several most challenging accreditation factors. The last two research questions focused on understanding how the accreditation outcomes improved throughout the review stages and how they were affected by institutional characteristics.

The first research questions sought to identify the most challenging accreditation standards at each review stage and the changes in citations over time. It was observed that institutions resolve accreditation issues relatively rapidly from the off-site review to the on-site and board review. However, specific accreditation standards proved more challenging to comply with, as citations on these three standards consistently appeared in all three stages: Educational Programs, Faculty Competence, and Academic and Student Support Services.

The second research question branded 36 factors according to underlying attributes emerging from the data. The top four most-cited factors were selected to reveal similarities with individual SACSCOC Principles.

- Institutional Effectiveness
- Competence and Performance
- Financial Stability
- Student Achievement

The CATPCA grouped the most challenging standards found in RQ1 in these four factors, with the top three challenging standards of Educational Programs and Academic and Student Support Services belonging to the Institutional Effectiveness factor and Faculty Competence belonging to the Competence and Performance factor.

To answer research question three, four institutional characteristics were incorporated into Mixed Repeated Measures Analyses of Variances to examine whether mean scores differences were significant over time and among different groups for the top four most challenging accreditation factors. It was evident in all four factors that mean scores were statistically different among review stages, indicating significant improvement over time in accreditation standard compliance. In addition, several effects of institutional characteristics were found, such as:

- Institutions with the highest tuition rates were more successful in decreasing the noncompliance scores on the Institutional Effectiveness Factor than other institutions with lower tuitions rates.

- Public institutions where the highest degree offered was a doctoral degree had better success in decreasing their noncompliance scores on the Competence and Performance Factor than the rest of the institutions.
- Schools without an open admission policy showed a steeper decrease in noncompliance scores on the Competence and Performance Factor scores.
- The Financial Stability Factor showed to be problematic for some institutions at the end of the review process, in particular for private institutions whose highest degree offering was a doctoral degree, for institutions without an open admission policy, for small institutions, and institutions with medium-to-high tuition rates.
- Regardless of the institutional characteristic, the Student Achievement Factor was one of the least problematic at the end of the review process.

The last section of this chapter proposed a regression model to examine the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and selected institutional characteristics at the Off-site stage. Only Type of institution and graduation rate variables had an effect on the number of citations received at the initial stage. A comprehensive discussion on key findings in relation to the literature is presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study examined accreditation records of two-year and four-year institutions in the SACSCOC membership that underwent a comprehensive accreditation review between 2013 and 2018. In particular, the study examined the most challenging accreditation standards and the relationship between noncompliance with accreditation standards and institutional characteristics at the three review stages of the SACSCOC accreditation process. This chapter offers a brief overview of the study and a discussion of key results interpreted through the theoretical framework that guided the study. Also, I discuss implications for both policy and practice, along with recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

Regional accreditation is one of the oldest forms of accountability in education (Brittingham, 2009; U. S. Department of Education, 2020a). In the United States, the U.S. Department of Education authorizes seven regional accrediting agencies to review and evaluate standards of higher education quality. These seven agencies are located in six established geographical regions and are responsible for the accreditation review process of member institutions periodically (CHEA, n.d.-c). In return, colleges and universities have access to federal financial programs and academic status (Ewell, 2008).

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is responsible for conducting accreditation reviews and accredits higher education institutions from 11 Southern states. For SACSCOC member institutions, one of the components of the accreditation process is the accreditation renewal, also referred to as the reaffirmation process, that occurs every ten years (Provezis, 2010). Institutions are accredited based on

successful compliance with SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. Previous qualitative and quantitative data have shown that institutions have difficulty demonstrating compliance, particularly with standards related to institutional effectiveness, including student learning outcomes, faculty qualifications, and school finances (Khoury, 2011; Sodhi, 2016) –but research had not studied the accreditation standards’ noncompliance results alongside institutional characteristics to find any possible association between the two.

Colleges and universities across the United States differ in many traits; some of those aspects can be tracked on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) institutional characteristics survey. For example, higher education institutions vary in size (student enrollment and FTE), location, sector, tuition rates, among other characteristics. Out of all institutional characteristics reported on IPEDS, Chapter 4 looked at five of these characteristics: Type of institution, which combined highest degree offering and sector, enrollment, admission policy, tuition rate, and graduation rate. Thus, an examination of noncompliance accreditation data in relation to institutional characteristics provides a new policy and research perspective to better understand the accreditation process for specific organizational contexts.

One of the study’s supporting theoretical frames was compliance theory. Through the lens of normative compliance, accrediting agencies set the procedures for accreditation requiring institutions to act and provide services according to specific norms and principles. For instance, SACSCOC relied on normative power patterns, carried through accrediting committees, to ensure compliance with its Principles of Accreditation. In addition, a second theoretical framework was established to leverage the structural differences among institutions in order to examine institutions as similar organizations (Manning, 2017), that is, hierarchical organizations

working towards the same objectives under clear guidelines (Etienne, 2011; Hertz & Livingston, 1950).

The main two objectives of this study were to identify and understand the most challenging standards of accreditation at all three review stages that may lead to accreditation sanctions and to explore the association between noncompliance and institutional characteristics. This dissertation used four research questions to guide the study's purpose and objectives:

1. What are the most challenging accreditation standards during each level of review? Are there any changes in noncompliance evaluation over the 3-stage review process?

This question was answered through a straightforward descriptive analysis by listing accreditation standards in descending order from the most cited to the least cited standard. To observe any changes in noncompliance across review stages, I performed the descriptive analysis at each stage: Off-site, On-site, and Board level.

2. What are the accreditation standards factors obtained by dimensionality reduction? Are the most challenging accreditation standards factors mapping the 2012 SACSCOC standards?

The dimensionality reduction of all 100 standards was achieved through a Categorical Principal Component Analysis. This technique allowed me to aggregate the original accreditation standards into smaller clusters of accreditation standard factors. In addition, an examination of SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation and the accreditation standard factors identified in the analysis helped to identify one-to-one mappings.

3. For the selected most challenging accreditation standards factors, are there differences in the mean scores by review level and selected institutional characteristics?

Institutional effectiveness, competence and performance, financial stability, and student achievement were the four accreditation standards factors that surfaced as the most challenging. A series of mixed Repeated Measures (RM) ANOVA were used to examine the effects of the review stage and the selected institutional characteristics on the mean scores of each of the four most challenging accreditation standards factors.

4. What is the relationship between the total number of accreditation citations and institutional characteristics?

To answer research question four, a multiple linear regression was used to model the effect of the type of institution, admission policy, enrollment, tuition rate, and graduation rate on the total number of noncompliance citations at the Off-site review stage. The model revealed that private institutions accumulate more citations than public institutions and that an increase in graduation rate predicts a decrease in noncompliance.

Discussion of Key Findings

This section presents key findings and provides interpretations of study findings integrated into the accreditation literature. First, I discuss aspects related to the SACSCOC reaffirmation review process. Second, I go over the most challenging accreditation standards in the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation, followed by a discussion of the mapping process to reduce all 100 standards into fewer groups of accreditation standards –the mapping process (or dimensionality reduction) clustered accreditation standards into meaningful factors that had a strong correlation and alignment, to some reasonable extent, with the most challenging 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. Finally, this section ends with a discussion of the relationships found between some institutional characteristics and the four accreditation standard

factors. I also discuss the relationship between institutional characteristics and noncompliance citations.

Review Process

The SACSCOC reaffirmation review process consists of three review stages; during the initial phase or best known as the off-site review, a peer-review committee judges the institution's self-assessment content and supporting data for each of the accreditation standards found in the Principles of Accreditation (Hasbun & Rudolph, 2016). If the peer-review committee finds the institution's narrative and supporting documentation satisfactory for each accreditation standard, the committee deems each standard compliant. However, findings show that this was the most challenging stage, and 100% of institutions had at least one noncompliance standard at the off-site stage. This result aligns with SACSCOC reports found in *Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Principles in Decennial Reaffirmation* (2019). Thus, one could argue that an institution's self-assessment evaluation outcome serves as a benchmark for the rest of the review stages as it displays the institution's strengths and weaknesses.

Then, within a year after the off-site review, a second peer-review committee visits the institution to meet with students, faculty, and staff to gauge the opinions and experiences of these groups as it relates to the institution's mission, strategic plan, and overall educational experience and services. This second review is known as the on-site review. Additionally, the committee re-evaluates the institution's responses to the accreditation standards; in particular, the committee focuses on those standards where the institution was deemed noncompliant during the off-site review stage (Ferrara, 2007). If the on-site committee determined that the institution did not address the concerns found during the off-site review, the committee marks the institution noncompliant once again in that particular standard (or standards). The study shows a clear drop

in noncompliance citations when institutions reach the second review stage, which, again, aligned with *Top 10 Most Frequently Cited Principles in Decennial Reaffirmation* (2019).

Finally, at the board stage, a committee on compliance and reports (C & R) assesses reports prepared by off-site and on-site evaluation committees along with responses from the institutions to those reports (SACSCOC, 2019b). The C & R makes recommendations about the institution's reaffirmation, and these recommendations are reviewed by an executive council that ultimately makes final recommendations to the full Board of Trustees (Eaton, 2012; Ferrara, 2007). At this final stage, the institution learns about its reaffirmation resolution and any other "monitoring activities" (SACSCOC, 2019b). Findings in this dissertation show that, on average, an institution received 0.85 citations at the board review stage (Table 4.1). This minor yet compromising outcome could end an institution's regional accreditation status if it does not comply with all *Principles of Accreditation* within a two-year monitoring period (SACSCOC, 2018b). Perhaps, at this stage, a noncompliant school experiences the normative power for the first time as extrinsic motivators crowd intrinsic motivators.

Most Challenging Accreditation Standards

The number of noncompliance citations reported in this study indicates that the standard related to Faculty Competence presented difficulties for most institutions, with 93.37% of the sample showing noncompliance at the Off-site stage. Institutions showed significant improvement at the On-site stage, with 28.57% of the sample showing noncompliance; still, Faculty Competence was the second most cited standard at this stage. Institutions significantly addressed issues related to faculty qualification by the third stage, when only 4.76% of the sample were noncompliant. These results aligned with descriptive statistics conducted on smaller samples by SACSCOC. For instance, a SACSCOC (2019) report shows that the problem of

Faculty Competence is a longstanding issue for schools which is confirmed by this study's sample using information dating back to 2013.

The second most problematic accreditation standard, and perhaps the most difficult for institutions to comply with, was Educational Programs. The study's findings show that 57.76% of the sample did not meet standards for compliance on Educational Programs at the Off-site stage. Yet, this accreditation standard continued in the top three of the most cited accreditation standards at the On-site stage. Of the study's sample, 28.57% of the institutions remained noncompliant. We learned from the literature that the failure to demonstrate compliance with Educational Programs is attributed to a lack of an institutional assessment culture, assessment processes, and student learning improvements (Cayuso, 2015; Sodhi, 2016). Moreover, the Educational Programs standard became the most cited accreditation standard by the board review stage, with 16.36% of the sample reporting noncompliance in the current study.

Other study findings showed that the Academic and Student Support and the Administrative Support Services standards were problematic for institutions as they remained in the top 5 most cited standards throughout the reaffirmation process (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998; Lattimore et al., 2012). These two standards, plus the Educational Program standard, all fall under the umbrella term of Institutional Effectiveness, which is the process of planning and evaluation of an institution's ability to accomplish its mission (SACSCOC, 2012).

Another accreditation standard that this study found in the top five most-cited was Financial Stability. However, Financial Stability only appeared in the top five most-cited standards at the Board stage, with 6% of institutions in the sample showing noncompliance. This result suggests that accreditors place emphasis on thorough audits to determine whether the institution has resources and reserves to carry on with its mission (Mullin, 2014; NWCCU 2010

Standards, 2010; SACSCOC, 2012 p. 20). Unfortunately, some institutions did not seem to be able to produce the documentation to demonstrate compliance with this standard toward the end of the reaffirmation process.

Accreditation Standards Mapping

This study used the 2012 SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* as the set of norms for compliance with SACSCOC accreditation requirements. Accordingly, Southern colleges and universities were expected to acquiesce to the guidelines found within each accreditation standard (Etienne, 2011) and increase compliance over time by rising the normative approach during a SACSCOC accreditation process. To this end, the 483 institutions in the sample addressed all 100 normative accreditation standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* manual at different times between 2013 and 2018. One aspect of the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation is that all 100 standards are organized into four sections based on their objective and focus: 1) The Principle of Integrity, 2) Core Requirements, 3) Comprehensive Standards, and 4) Federal Requirements. Furthermore, standards in each of these four sections were further organized into subsections: One subsection under *The Principle of Integrity*, 12 subsections under the Core Requirements, 14 subsections under the *Comprehensive Standards*, and nine subsections under the *Federal Requirements* for a total of 36 subsections. Ultimately, the 100 accreditation standards arrangement represented the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation and were the norm for accreditation compliance from 2012 to 2018.

The data collected for this study had only been organized according to the structure described above in an attempt to mirror the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* using the noncompliance data. Therefore, this dissertation used a statistical approach to explore different groupings of the 100 accreditation standards based on accreditation noncompliance citations

rather than the prescribed conceptual organization in the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. First, I employed a Categorical Principal Component Analysis (CATPCA) to reduce the 100 standards into a new set of 36 uncorrelated subsections, which this study refers to them as accreditation standards factors. This reduction was accomplished by running the CATPCA on the number of noncompliance citations at all three review stages. The data reduction produced 36 newly formed accreditation standards factors that were labeled according to underlying similarities in the accreditation standards within each factor. Out of the 36 subsections found on the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation, 13 factors resulting from the CATPCA had a one-to-one mapping. This result suggests that the 2012 SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* could have been arranged based on inherited descriptions within each accreditation standard.

Four accreditation standards factors stood out from the CATPCA for having the largest scores of all 36 factors. The first accreditation standard factor was made by seven standards related to institutional effectiveness; hence it was labeled Institutional Effectiveness. The second accreditation standard factor had an underlying faculty competence and employee performance evaluation characteristics; therefore, the factor was labeled Competence and Performance. The third accreditation standard factor had characteristics related to financial resources and stability, and so the factor was labeled Financial Stability. Finally, the fourth factor considered in this study was a single standard factor corresponding to Student Achievement. Collectively, the four most challenging factors considered in this study covered 16 out of the 100 SACSCOC accreditation standards and only two out of the 36 SACSCOC subsections (Institutional Effectiveness and Financial Resources.) However, the four most challenging factors aligned with the top three critical issues in regional accreditation in the Southern region as detailed in the

literature review chapter: institutional effectiveness, faculty qualifications, and fiscal resources (Baylor, 2010; Powell, 2013; Young, 2010).

Institutional Characteristics and Accreditation Factors

Some IPEDS institutional characteristics were not used in the study because they did not present sufficient variability or presented significant missing information. However, the institutions in the sample had complete data on the selected five institutional characteristics: the Type of institutions, Admissions policy, Enrollment Range, Tuition Range, and Graduation rate. As far as accreditation noncompliance citations, this study used the four accreditation standards factors of Institutional Effectiveness, Competence and Performance, Financial Stability, and Student Achievement and tracked their means at the Off-site, On-site, and Board review stage. Some key results will be discussed in relation to the literature.

First, while institutional characteristics are mainly used to keep up with institutional trends, most notably graduation rates (Pike & Robbins, 2020), no other study has attempted to examine the relationship between institutional characteristics and regional accreditation compliance. Marsh (2014), for instance, used institutional characteristics, in particular characteristics related to expenditures, to explain the relationship between college finances and student retention. Similarly, Calcagno et al. (2008) found that enrollment size at minority-serving community colleges negatively correlated with student retention and completion. Other research (Flores & Park, 2013; Urias & Wood, 2014) gravitated to using institutional characteristics to explain effects on student success indicators rather than regional accreditation. Since the study findings cannot always be compared with existing research, I only offer interpretations based on provisions of unstudied features.

Second, this study found that regardless of the Type of institution, Admission policy, Enrollment Range, or Tuition Range, all colleges and universities significantly decreased the rate of noncompliance citations from one review stage to the next. Compliance theory explains this improvement in compliance as a direct result of an increased normative approach motivated by an implicit normative power (Etienne, 2011).

Finally, regardless of the institutional characteristic, the Student Achievement Factor was one of the least problematic at the end of the review process. This result can be attributed to the institution's ability to eventually demonstrate a comprehensive student success data collection and reporting process. The Student Achievement Factor only requires colleges and universities to show proof of student success data collection rather than prove student success improvements (SACSCOC, 2010; SACSCOC, 2012)

Tuition rates. Most notably, institutions with the lowest tuition rates showed the least noncompliance with Student Achievement scores than institutions in higher Tuition Ranges. One explanation for this result could be associated with two-year institutions or community colleges as they have lower tuition rates and fewer student achievement data to evaluate than institutions with higher tuitions rates. Additionally, the decrease over time in Student Achievement noncompliance scores improved differently for all five tuition ranges. This finding may explain that institutions within each Tuition Range eventually become compliant with the Student Achievement requirements.

Type of institutions. In this study, *Type of institution* variable resulted from combining Control, Level, and Highest Degree Offering resulting in five mutually exclusive categories. Notably, studies, such as Calcagno et al. (2008) and Marsh (2014), found contrasting results when determining the effect of institution's Level (i.e., two-year and four-year institutions) on

student retention and completion (elements of Student Achievement accreditation factor), with four-year institutions reporting positive rates of student retention compared to two-year colleges. However, on the Student Achievement Factor, private four-year institutions where the highest degree offered was a doctorate had the least success in decreasing noncompliance citations.

Therefore, it was not entirely surprising to find significant differences among the five categories of Type of institutions on noncompliance decline for most accreditation standard factors. For instance, public institutions where the highest degree offered was a doctoral degree had better success in decreasing their noncompliance scores on the Competence and Performance Factor than the other four types of institutions. Another result shows that public institutions where the highest degree offered was a bachelor's or master's degree addressed noncompliance on the Financial Stability Factor more effectively than the rest of the institutions.

While these results support the relationship between the type of institution and accreditation noncompliance citations, no relationships were found between *Type of institution* on the Institutional Effectiveness Factor. Perhaps this means that institutions struggle at similar rates to decrease these noncompliance issues described by the most challenging factor found in this study.

Open admission. An even less studied institutional characteristic is the Admission Policy, which refers to whether a school has an open enrollment policy or has a competitive process for admitting students. In general, most two-year colleges have an open admission policy compared to four-year institutions, and they tend to have lower tuition rates. In the sample, 43.3% of the institutions had an open admission policy, with the majority being two-year colleges.

Study findings showed that schools without an open admission policy had a steeper decrease in noncompliance citations on the Competence and Performance Factor scores over time. However, by the end of the reaffirmation process, institutions with open admission were more effective at addressing noncompliance matters related to the Competence and Performance Factor. Similarly, schools with open admission received fewer citations at all three levels of the reaffirmation process and addressed noncompliance issues more successfully than institutions without an open admission policy on the Financial Stability Factor. One explanation for the lower scores for Open Admission institutions is that institutions with a 100% admission rate are in larger numbers funded by local governments, and therefore there is a higher degree of accountability, compliance, and transparency (Marchese, 1991; Rabovsky, 2012). In addition, the normative effects associated with compliance theory bring a sense of accountability and moral involvement to individuals that internalize over time (Lunenburg, 2012).

Enrollment. One would expect that larger institutions are more successful in complying with the Principles of Accreditation because they have more staff involved in accreditation and compliance than smaller colleges. However, enrollment-wise, the size of an institution does not have a relationship to noncompliance citations on Institutional Effectiveness, Competence and Performance, and Student Achievement Factors. Still, larger institutions are more likely to address noncompliance issues on the Financial Stability Factor with more success than smaller schools. Organizational theory suggests that higher education institutions are complex organizations facing internal and external influences where regardless of internal organizational conditions, strategy implementation aligns with mission, norms, and expectations to maintain institutions at optimal operations (Birken, 2017). Hence, it is not about the institutional characteristics but shifts in internal environments and how institutions respond to these changes.

Institutional Characteristics and Overall Noncompliance

Graduation rate is one of the most researched student success indicators in higher education, perhaps because it indicates the successful return on investment for students (Baer, 2017; McGrane, 2013) or because it serves as a measure of an institution's effectiveness in preparing students for the job market or further education (Rabovsky, 2012). Researchers have studied this topic for many years and are as desegregated as possible (Allen, 1999; Bolkan et al., 2021; Eckard, 2020; Scott et al., 2006; Winters, 2018). However, up until recent years, graduation rate and accreditation were not a topic of interest in higher education. Now, the political climate surrounding higher education has several student success metrics, including graduation rate, at the center of school funding decisions (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018) and accreditation compliance. Nonetheless, no research has been conducted on the relationship between graduation rates and the overall number of accreditation citations.

Thus, the question was: Can certain institutional characteristics help explain the number of citations an institution might likely receive at the off-site review stage? As a reminder, the question was restricted to the off-site review stage only because the significant decrease in noncompliance after this stage practically eliminated any outcome variability. The linear regression model in this study returned that only Type of institution and Graduation rate had a significant effect on the number of citations received at the initial stage. Looking at the type of institution, private 4-year institutions offering Doctoral degrees report nine citations more than public two-year institutions in agreement with Burnett's (2020) results on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Similarly, public 4-year institutions offering bachelor, master, or doctoral degrees report about five more citations than two-year colleges. This result is of

particular interest as no comparable results were found in the literature, and it needs careful consideration in future research.

As expected, the graduation rate has a negative effect on the total number of noncompliance citations, where for every percent increase in graduation rate, there is a significant decrease in the number of citations. These study findings are supported by Burnett (2020), one of the most recent works on the type of institutions, graduations rates, and regional accreditation. For example, Burnett found that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), primarily private institutions according to IPEDS data, receive more accreditation citations that lead to negative accreditation actions than other types of institutions.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study has several implications for policy and practice regarding regional accreditation. The study provides a broad initial look at the relationships between accreditation noncompliance citations and IPEDS institutional characteristics. The implications include a decrease in the number of accreditation standards, more specific language in the description of standards, improved training for institutions' accreditation practitioners, and federal support for public institutions.

Implications for Policy

To help institutions achieve better outcomes earlier in the reaffirmation review process, a reduction in the number of accreditation standards may be of interest to accreditors. This result can be achieved by reducing the number of accreditations standards to those areas in which institutions need the most support, such as institutional effectiveness standards, faculty and staff competence, financial resources, and student achievement.

In addition, this research presented us with a list of top standards that institutions have difficulties addressing and standards that are not problematic or perhaps duplicated. With an emphasis on the most cited accreditation standards, colleges and universities can spend more time and effort attending to the warning signs that lead to citations. Accreditors could mandate institutions to form standing accreditation committees whose membership comes from critical areas highlighted in this study. Each area committee would be responsible for all accreditation procedures and documentation and co-chaired by the institution's president and accreditation liaison to better understand and focus on specific standards.

Accreditors can use the results in this dissertation to address expectations for faculty and administrators, primarily in problematic areas highlighted by the four accreditation standards factors. For example, the Institutional Effectiveness Factor needs faculty involvement; however, SACSCOC (2012) does not mention faculty in any of the standards grouped under the Institutional Effectiveness Factor, and it is left to the "institution" to demonstrate compliance. Another example is the Competence and Performance Factor; this factor requires attention from the institution's leadership, such as provost, vice presidents, or officers accountable for the performance and competence of faculty and staff; yet, the descriptions of the standards grouped under the Competence and Performance Factor only refer to the "institution" with no specific reference to leadership. Therefore, including a more explicit language where faculty and administrators' roles are delineated in the standards' description can reinforce the organizational structure as recommended in organizational theories (Manning, 2017) and improve accreditation compliance.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study offer motivation for collaboration among higher education institutions to help rethink their approach to regional accreditation compliance. Even though it is true that the self-study report is unique to each institution, it is also true that the type of institution was found relevant in relation to accreditation standard citations. Therefore, institutions, small or large, private or public, need to embrace the idea of cross-collaboration and to develop mentor programs for employees responsible for accreditation, with the purpose to share accreditation best practices and ultimately increase the accreditation compliance culture in the region.

At a federal level, authorities need to take a closer look at the type of institutions getting the most citations, followed by accreditation actions, to ensure that the accreditation process does not disproportionately affect some institutions more than others. For example, the federal government could work with accreditors to provide data-informed assistance to ‘at risk’ institutions nearing their reaffirmation review. Additionally, the Department of Education needs to hold regional accrediting agencies accountable for more data transparency and accessibility to increase access to information, leading to a higher volume of regional accreditation research.

Consequently, another implication for practice is at the regional accrediting agency level. As revealed in Chapter two, there is a lack of research conducted by the accrediting agencies; thus, all seven regional accrediting agencies must conduct qualitative and quantitative research to increase the volume of scholarly work available to accreditation practitioners.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study scratches the surface of higher education regional accreditation, and it opens the gates for more inquiry and analysis. At the core, this dissertation intends to bring attention to

an area of higher education essential for the existence of institutions in this day and age. With the knowledge gained in this study, future research could focus on studying specifically two-year colleges or only private 4-year colleges. For instance, the idea that HBCUs receive more penalties from accreditors (Burnett, 2020) should signal researchers and practitioners that there is more to explore in this field.

This study looked at accreditation citations of colleges and universities disaggregated at the institutional level (Per IPEDS collection). However, more research on accreditation compliance is needed to employ other datasets disaggregated by student demographics, single-gender colleges, rural/urban colleges, faculty ratios, or organizational structure. In addition, at a national level, other regional accrediting agencies could mirror the methodology in this dissertation to study the relationship between IPEDS institutional data and accreditation citations or actions.

This research found four accreditation standards factors that can be further studied in more detail. Perhaps more attention is needed in the areas of institutional effectiveness, employee competence and performance, school finances, and student achievement reporting to understand even more the difficulties schools encounter to demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards related to these areas.

Finally, from a policy standpoint, research is needed to look at how federal policy is shifting the expectations of accrediting agencies and the consequences for higher education institutions. For example, recent federal regulations have opened the door for competition among regional accrediting agencies. This policy change could have significant implications for institutions and could signal the end of regional accreditation. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether institutions voluntarily opt-out their regional accreditor to seek membership elsewhere.

Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations, some recorded in previous chapters. First, the data collected from SACSCOC was merged with data from IPEDS. The merge of the two databases created data gaps for some institutions and had to be removed from some analyses. Also, not all institutions in the sample reported institutional characteristics in 2018 IPEDS. Simply put, missing information on some variables required decreasing the sample size for some research questions. However, as stated previously, the sample remained large enough to conduct multivariate statistical analyses. On the other hand, the sample included a higher percentage of public institutions than the SACSCOC membership, which is another limitation of the study. Therefore, fewer gaps in institutional characteristics data would have strengthened the validity of the results in this dissertation.

IPEDS data was obtained from the 2018 IPEDS surveys, while SACSCOC data was obtained from the Office of Training and Research at SACSCOC. Accreditation data was obtained from institutions with a reaffirmation review between 2013 and 2018. On the other hand, the data from IPEDS contained records for most institutions in the sample collected in 2018, not the same year as the reaffirmation review. Therefore, matching accreditation data to the same year as IPEDS data would have reduced the sample size and the validity of the results. However, matching IPEDS data to each institution's reaffirmation review year would address this limitation, but it would also increase the data collection process significantly. Although this can be viewed as a limitation of the study, it is unlikely that major changes in institutional characteristics occurred for the public 4-year and 2-year institutions and the private 4-year institutions selected for analysis.

One more limitation in this study was the lack of literature related to quantitative regional accreditation research, which did not allow for better integration of study findings in the existing research. Most studies focused on either one institution's accreditation results or experiences or the relationship of a single accreditation standard on an institution's reaffirmation (Provezis, 2010). However, this makes the study findings even more significant since large-scale regional accreditation research is necessary to normalize the conversation across college and university campuses regarding issues affecting higher education accreditation.

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the existing literature of higher education regional accreditation in the sense that it offers a broader perspective of the accreditation compliance process for colleges and universities in Southern states by revealing the most common accreditation compliance challenges. In addition, this dissertation pushes the boundaries of regional accreditation research by incorporating institutional data into existing accreditation noncompliance records, which is a largely unexplored field. This study also provides an opportunity to demystify the concept of regional accreditation and encourages practitioners to collaborate across institutions to create support networks and expand resources that help institutions achieve better outcomes earlier in the reaffirmation review process.

This work is relevant for the higher education system as it reveals a disconnect between what colleges and universities in the South know about compliance assurance and what SACSCOC expects from its membership. The results on the most challenging standards show that the need for continued accreditation compliance training is imperative for institutions and review committees to narrow the noncompliance gap.

At a practical level, this study contributes new knowledge and perspectives about accreditation through a region-wide analysis. Faculty, administrators, and compliance practitioners will benefit from the results found in this dissertation as they unveil new information that is helpful for committees preparing compliance reports. Also, the inclusion of IPEDS and principles of accreditation data into one study is significant to accreditation agencies since this research can be easily replicated and improved on the other six regional accrediting agencies. Although this research is focused on SACSCOC member institutions, the findings in this study have practical applications for any of the seven accrediting regions because the large scope of the data and the shared objective of accreditation ensure the transferability of study findings. Finally, the scope of this study helps provide a glimpse of new areas of exploration in higher education to advance scholarly work in accreditation that ultimately leads to improved teaching and learning, enriched student experience, and better-prepared communities.

Conclusion

Through the lens of two theoretical frameworks, compliance and organizational, this dissertation sought to study the 2012 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation as a form of normative power exercised by SACSCOC on its members to understand better how institutions, as complex organizations, responded to noncompliance citations at each review stage of the reaffirmation process. This dissertation explored both accreditation noncompliance citations and institutional characteristics of colleges and universities in the SACSCOC membership to understand their relationship as it relates to the response to become compliant with the Principles of Accreditation. In studying these relationships, all institutions make significant improvements towards compliance over time which demonstrates the importance of the normative approach in the relationship between organizations and the accreditation agency. The objectives, methods,

and findings in this dissertation have the potential to encourage other researchers and practitioners to continue studying regional accreditation related to compliance assurance strategies.

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APPENDIX A

Data Collection and Management

To access data for the sample, I submitted a formal request following SACSCOC guidelines of “Data or Research Assistance” (*Request for Data or Research Assistance*, 2015).

The formal data request needed to accompany a series of supporting information:

- I. Institutional IRB approval of the proposed research project (if applicable)
(Appendix B)
- II. Cogent project overview (4-8 pages) containing the following elements:
 1. An overall problem statement for the research project
 2. Statement that explains the importance of the proposed project for SACSCOC membership and clearly aligns the proposed project with the SACSCOC strategic plan (<http://sacscoc.org/about-sacscoc/>)
 3. A list of specific research questions guiding the study
 4. An outline of conceptual/theoretical framework for the inquiry
 5. An overview of proposed methodology:
 - a. Research design
 - b. Data collection methods
 - c. Data analysis methods
 - d. Timeline
 6. Description of specific assistance needed from SACSCOC staff
- III. Letter of support from the Dissertation/Thesis Committee Chair (*Request for Data or Research Assistance*, 2015) (Appendix B)

After submitting the petition for data, the office of training and research reviewed my data request packet, and it was sent over to the SACSCOC Peer Review Advisory Board (PRAB) for recommendation to the SACSCOC President, who gave the final approval (Appendix C). The original plan to collect institutional characteristics data was to download datasets from IPEDS. These data are publicly available at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/download-access-database>. However, SACSCOC compiled these datasets for my study and merged them with the SACSCOC data to ensure institutions could not be identified. I received all the data for the assembled in Excel files.

SACSCOC required a rigorous data management. After the Commission shared the data file with me, I encrypted and saved the file on a OneDrive folder. I referred to such a file on this dissertation as the Master Data File (MDF). The MDF contains accreditation review outcomes at all three stages of review for all institutions that underwent a review between the years 2013 to 2018. The MDF will be kept for up to three years from January 2021, and after that, it will be deleted, and the folder purged from OneDrive and recycle bin. The MDF did not have any records that could identify any institution. Furthermore, all subsequent files generated from the MDF used an assigned research identification number (I.D.) to reinforce the institutions' anonymity. I kept all files stored in OneDrive. Descriptive study findings are presented in aggregated form, and there was no focus on any specific I.D. Similarly, summary data does not include any I.D.

APPENDIX B

UTA IRB and Dissertation Chair Letter of Support



UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
REGULATORY SERVICES

6/10/2020

IRB Approval of Minimal Risk (MR) Protocol

PI: Ricardo Rodriguez

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Maria Trache

Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

IRB Protocol #: 2020-0756

Study Title: *Higher Education Regional Accreditation: What Institutional Characteristics Tell Us About Southern Colleges and Universities Accreditation Status*

Effective Approval: 6/10/2020

The IRB has approved the above referenced submission in accordance with applicable regulations and/or UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures.

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

All personnel conducting human subject research must comply with UTA's [IRB Standard Operating Procedures](#) and [RA-PO4, Statement of Principles and Policies Regarding Human Subjects in Research](#). Important items for PIs and Faculty Advisors are as follows:

- ****Notify [Regulatory Services](#) of proposed, new, or changing funding source****
- Fulfill research oversight responsibilities, [IV.F and IV.G](#).
- Obtain approval prior to initiating changes in research or personnel, [IX.B](#).
- Report Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) and Unanticipated Problems (UPs), [IX.C](#).
- Fulfill Continuing Review requirements, if applicable, [IX.A](#).
- Protect human subject data ([XV](#)) and maintain records ([XXI.C](#)).
- Maintain [HSP](#) (3 years), [GCP](#) (3 years), and [RCR](#) (4 years) training as applicable

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UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

**DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND POLICY STUDIES**

To: Dr. Alexei Matveev
SACSCOC Director of the Office of Training and Research

June 8, 2020

Dear Dr. Matveev:

I write on behalf of Mr. Ricardo Rodriguez to support his data request to the Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Mr. Rodriguez is a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and his dissertation research focuses on issues related to the accreditation status of higher education institutions. I strongly support the study and will supervise Mr. Rodriguez on his research related to higher education accreditation until the completion of his doctoral program.

The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to promoting a culture of intellectual curiosity, rigorous inquiry, and high academic standards. Mr. Rodriguez's character envelops these principles, and I can attest that his interest in higher education accreditation is genuine. Ever since he entered our graduate program, Mr. Rodriguez has focused on studying regional accreditation in the U. S. with a more specific focus on the southern region. Mr. Rodriguez's doctoral dissertation topic is unique in the field of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, yet it represents everything our program is about, and I hope that his findings benefit current and future regional accreditation researchers and practitioners. I can also assure you that the data management will be handled properly at UTA.

I view Mr. Rodriguez's research proposal as a promising outcome for the field of higher education accreditation, and it has my full support. I also remain available for any further clarification (email: mtrache@uta.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "M Trache".

Maria Trache, PhD
Professor
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APPENDIX C

SACSCOC Approval Letter

Alexei G. Matveev amatveev@sacscoc.org

To: Ricardo Rodriguez

Cc: Godfrey Noe gnoe@sacscoc.org

Dear Ricardo,

Attached, please find an Excel spreadsheet with the data for your project. The data were modified to address PRAB's conditions for data release. As the file is complex, please contact my colleague Dr. Godfrey Fuji Noe, Coordinator of Training and Research, to discuss the structure of the file and variables if you have questions. Dr. Noe can be reached at gnoe@sacscoc.org or 404-994-6573.

Thank you for completing the SACSCOC Confidentiality Form. In addition, we ask that you (i) use the attached data only for your dissertation research project as presented to the PRAB; (ii) keep the data confidential; (iii) keep the data in secure location; and (iv) destroy the data upon completion of your research project and dissertation defense. We will also appreciate if you could share with the Commission the results of your analyses, discussion of findings, and conclusions prior to any public release or publication.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you again for your scholarly interest in accreditation. Good luck with your research project!

Alexei G. Matveev, Ph.D.

Director of Training and Research

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

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APPENDIX D

Data Request and Approval Timeline

Date	Communication
March 23, 2020	The initial expression of research interest to SACSCOC, office of Training and Research.
March 23, 2020	Invitation from SACSCOC to submit the data request to the office of Training and Research.
June 10, 2020	UTA IRB protocol approval
June 12, 2020	Formal data request submitted to the office Training and Research at SACSCOC.
July 6, 2020	SACSCOC Peer Review Advisor Committee (PRAB) began the evaluation process of the data request.
August 3, 2020	SACSCOC Peer Review Advisor Committee (PRAB) denies initial data request.
August 14, 2020	Data request appeal to SACSCOC Peer Review Advisor Committee (PRAB). This request contained a modified version of the initial request; however, it eliminated highly confidential variables.
October 15, 2020	SACSCOC Peer Review Advisor Committee (PRAB) meets to evaluate the revised data request.
November 19, 2020	SACSCOC Peer Review Advisor Committee (PRAB) approves with conditions the revised data request.
November 23, 2020	PRAB conditions are met, and data request can proceed to SACSCOC President for final approval.
January 26, 2021	Signature of SACSCOC Confidentiality Statement attesting to the ethical management and use of the Commission's data.
February 11, 2021	SACSCOC President approves data request
February 11, 2021	SACSCOC office of Training and Research provides all datasets for my study

APPENDIX E

SACSCOC Data File Excerpt

InstitutionIdentificationNumber	ReviewType	1_1Integrity	2_1DegreegrantingAuthority	2_2GoverningBoard
1	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
1	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
1	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
2	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
2	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
2	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
3	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
3	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
3	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
4	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
4	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
4	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
5	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
5	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
5	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
6	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
6	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
6	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
7	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
7	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
7	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
8	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
8	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
8	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
9	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
9	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
9	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
10	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
10	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
10	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
11	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
11	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
11	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
12	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
12	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
12	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
13	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
13	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
13	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
14	On-Site	Null	Null	Null
14	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null
14	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
15	CAndR	Null	Null	Null
15	Off-Site	Null	Null	Null

Note. Due to the size of the table and data confidentiality agreement, I can only provide a snapshot of the data file with hidden data values.

APPENDIX F

IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Data (Reduced File)

InstitutionIdentificationNumber	SECTOR	CONTROL	ICLEVEL	HDEG OFR1	OPEN ADMP	ENRTOT Category	Graduation RateTotal	TuitionAndFees2018_19 Category
1	4	1	2	40	1	1	17	1
2	4	1	2	40	1	1	47	1
3	2	2	1	30	2	1	81	5
4	4	1	2	40	1	1	43	1
5	2	2	1	11	2	1	51	4
6	4	1	2	40	1	1	24	1
7	4	1	2	40	1	1	38	1
8	2	2	1	30	1	1	38	2
9	4	1	2	40	1	1	51	1
10	4	1	2	40	1	1	32	1
11	1	1	1	13	2	2	45	1
12	1	1	1	11	2	1	62	1
13	1	1	1	12	2	1	44	1
14	4	1	2	40	1	1	45	1
15	4	1	2	40	1	1	34	1
16	2	2	1	20	2	1	52	3
17	2	2	1	20	2	1	27	3
18	4	1	2	40	1	1	26	1
19	2	2	1	12	2	1	24	2
20	2	2	1	20	2	1	31	3
21	2	2	1	20	2	1	52	4
22	4	1	2	40	2	1	24	1
23	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null	Null
24	4	1	2	40	1	1	44	1
25	4	1	2	40	1	2	18	1
26	2	2	1	11	2	1	89	5
27	4	1	2	40	1	1	33	1
28	2	2	1	20	2	1	52	4
29	1	1	1	12	2	1	39	1
30	1	1	1	30	2	1	78	2
31	4	1	2	40	1	1	33	1
32	1	1	1	11	2	2	67	2
33	4	1	2	40	1	1	17	1
34	2	2	1	11	2	1	94	5
35	4	1	2	40	1	1	43	1
36	1	1	1	30	1	3	44	1
37	1	1	1	12	2	1	42	1
38	1	1	1	12	2	1	43	1

APPENDIX F Continued

Description of Institutional Characteristics

INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTIC	VAR CODE	VAR VALUE	VAR LABEL	VAR DESCRIPTION	
SECTOR	0	-	Administrative Unit	One of nine institutional categories resulting from dividing the universe according to control and level. Control categories are public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit. Level categories are 4-year and higher (4 year), 2-but-less-than 4-year (2 year), and less than 2-year. For example: public, 4-year institutions.	
SECTOR	1	-	Public, 4-year or above		
SECTOR	2	-	Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above		
SECTOR	3	-	Private for-profit, 4-year or above		
SECTOR	4	-	Public, 2-year		
SECTOR	5	-	Private not-for-profit, 2-year		
SECTOR	6	-	Private for-profit, 2-year		
SECTOR	7	-	Public, less-than 2-year		
SECTOR	8	-	Private not-for-profit, less-than 2-year		
SECTOR	9	-	Private for-profit, less-than 2-year		
SECTOR	-1	-	Sector unknown (not active)		
CONTROL	1	-	Public		Control - A classification of whether an institution is operated by publicly elected or appointed officials (public control) or by privately elected or appointed officials and derives its major source of funds from private sources (private control).
CONTROL	2	-	Private not-for-profit		
CONTROL	3	-	Private for-profit		
CONTROL	-1	-	{Not available}		
				Level - A classification of whether an institution's programs are 4-year or higher (4 year), 2-but-less-than 4-year (2 year), or less than 2-year.	
				A classification of whether an institution is operated by publicly elected or appointed officials or by privately elected or appointed officials and derives its major source of funds from private sources.	
				Public institution - An educational institution whose programs and activities are operated by publicly elected or appointed school officials and which is supported primarily by public funds.	
				Private not-for-profit institution - A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency in control receives no compensation, other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk. These include both independent not-for-profit schools and those affiliated with a religious organization.	
				Private for-profit institution - A private institution in which the individual(s) or agency in control receives compensation	

				other than wages, rent, or other expenses for the assumption of risk.
ICLEVEL	1	-	Four or more years	A classification of whether an institution's programs are 4-year or higher (4 year), 2-but-less-than 4-year (2 year), or less than 2-year.
ICLEVEL	2	-	At least 2 but less than 4 years	
ICLEVEL	3	-	Less than 2 years (below associate)	
ICLEVEL	-1	-	{Not available}	
HDEGOFR1	11	-	Doctor's degree - research/scholarship and professional practice	A code for highest degree offered at the institution - This variable was revised in 2009 because the first professional category is no longer an award level and the Doctoral award level category has expanded to 3 categories, Doctor's degree - Research/scholarships, Doctor's degree - professional practice and Doctor's degree-other.
HDEGOFR1	12	-	Doctor's degree - research/scholarship	
HDEGOFR1	13	-	Doctor's degree - professional practice	
HDEGOFR1	14	-	Doctor's degree - other	This variable is derived from the level of offering variables (LEVEL1-LEVEL8 LEVEL12 and LEVEL17-LEVEL19) from the Institutional Characteristics component as follows:
HDEGOFR1	20	-	Master's degree	
HDEGOFR1	30	-	Bachelor's degree	IF LEVEL17=1 and LEVEL18=1 then HDEGOFR1=11 else if LEVEL17=1 and LEVEL18 ne 1 then HDEGOFR1=12 else if LEVEL17 ne 1 and LEVEL18=1 then HDEGOFR1=13 else if LEVEL17 ne 1 and LEVEL18 ne 1 and LEVEL19=1 then HDEGOFR1=14 else if LEVEL7=1HDEGOFR1=20 else if LEVEL5=1HDEGOFR1=30 else if LEVEL3=1HDEGOFR1=40 else if LEVEL1=1 or LEVEL2=1 or LEVEL4=1 or LEVEL6=1 or LEVEL8=1 or LEVEL12=1 then HDEGOFR1=0 else HDEGOFR1=-3; For more information see descriptions of LEVEL1-LEVEL12
HDEGOFR1	40	-	Associate's degree	
HDEGOFR1	0	-	Non-degree granting	
HDEGOFR1	-1	-	{Not available}	
OPENADMP	1	-	Yes	Does your institution have an open admission policy for all or most entering first-time undergraduate-level students?
OPENADMP	2	-	No	OPEN ADMISSION - Admission policy whereby the school will accept any student who applies.
OPENADMP	-1	-	Not reported	FIRST-TIME STUDENT (UNDERGRADUATE) - A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes
OPENADMP	-2	-	Not applicable	

				students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. Also includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school).
ENRTOT Category	1	1	Range 1	Total men and women enrolled for credit in the fall of the academic year.
ENRTOT Category	2	15830	Range 2	CREDIT - Recognition of attendance or performance in an instructional activity (course or program) that can be applied by a recipient toward the requirements for a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award. NOTE: Enrollment reported is of the institution's official fall reporting date or October 15.
ENRTOT Category	3	31661	Range 3	
ENRTOT Category	4	47491	Range 4	
ENRTOT Category	5	63322	Range 5	
SFTETOTL Category	1	1	Range 1	
SFTETOTL Category	2	2936	Range 2	Categories include: Instructional, research and public service FTE ---Instructional FTE ---Research FTE --- Public Service FTE Librarians, Curators, and Archivists/Student and Academic Affairs and Other Education Services FTE ---Librarians, Curators, and Archivists FTE ---Student and Academic Affairs and Other Education Services FTE Management FTE Business and Financial Operations FTE Computer, Engineering, and Science FTE Community Service, Legal, Arts, and Media FTE Healthcare FTE Service, sales, office/admin support, natural resources, construction, maintenance, production, transportation & materials moving FTE ---Service FTE ---Sales and Related FTE ---Office and Administrative Support FTE
SFTETOTL Category	3	5873	Range 3	
SFTETOTL Category	4	8809	Range 4	
SFTETOTL Category	5	11746	Range 5	
SFTETOTL Category				

				<p>---Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance FTE</p> <p>---Production, Transportation, and Material Moving FTE</p>
DefaultRateOf2016Cohort			SACS Table	<p>For schools having 30 or more borrowers entering repayment in a fiscal year, the school's cohort default rate is the percentage of a school's borrowers who enter repayment on certain Federal Family Education Loans (FFELs) and/or William D. Ford Federal Direct Loans (Direct Loans) during that fiscal year and default (or meet the other specified condition) within the cohort default period. For schools with 29 or fewer borrowers entering repayment during a fiscal year, the cohort default rate is an "average rate" based on borrowers entering repayment over a three-year period.</p>
GraduationRateTotal	-	-	SACS Table	<p>Graduation rate of first-time, full-time degree or certificate-seeking students-2012 cohort (4-year institutions) and 2015 cohort (less-than-4-year institutions). The graduation rate is the raterequired for disclosure and/or reporting purposes under Student Right-to-Know. This rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the revised cohort minus any allowable exclusions.</p> <p>For 4-year institutions the adjusted cohort is defined by the variable GRTOTLT when GRATYPE=2 and the total completers within 150% of normal time is GRTOTLT when GRATYPE=3. GRATYPE=2 and 3 include both the bachelor's or equivalent degree/certificate-seeking subcohort and the other degree/certificate-seeking subcohort (Table gr2018).</p> <p>For 2-year institutions the adjusted cohort is defined by the variable GRTOTLT when GRATYPE=29 and the total completers within 150% of normal time is GRTOTLT when GRATYPE=30 (Table gr2018).</p> <p>For less-than-2-year institutions the adjusted cohort defined by the variable LINE_50 and the total completers within 150% of normal time is LINE_11 (Table gr2018_L2)</p> <p>Normal time to completion -The amount</p>

				<p>of time necessary for a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to the institution's catalog. This is typically 4 years (8 semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer terms) for a bachelor's degree in a standard term-based institution</p> <p>Allowable exclusions - Those students who may be removed (deleted) from the GRS cohort according to the Student Right-to-Know legislation. These include students who died or were totally and permanently disabled; those who left school to serve in the armed forces; those who left to serve with a foreign aid service of the federal government, such as the Peace Corps; and those who left to serve on official church mission.</p>
TuitionAndFees2018_19 Category	1	\$ 1	Range 1	<p>Published tuition and fees, 2018-19 for academic year reporters only</p> <p>These data came from the 2017-18 in-district tuition and fee variable(CHG1AY3) on the price of attendance question of the IC component.</p> <p>IF institution does not charge different tuition for in-district students(CHG1AY3) from in-state students(CHG2AY3),the in-district charge would contain the same amount as the in-state (CHG1AY3=CHG2AY3).</p> <p>If the institution does not vary tuition by in-district,in-state, and out-of-state(CHG3AY3), the tuition and fee amount is stored in all 3 variables (CHG1AY3=CHG2AY3=CHG3AY3)</p> <p>Price of attendance for full-time, first-time undergraduate students for the FULL ACADEMIC YEAR: (Tuition and fees are those amounts used by your financial aid office for determining eligibility for student financial assistance) These data are published at the IPEDS College Navigator Web site</p> <p>In-district published tuition and required fees for 2017-18</p> <p>IN-DISTRICT TUITION - The tuition charged by the institution to those students residing in the locality in which they attend school. This may be a lower</p>

				<p>rate than in-state tuition if offered by the institution.</p> <p>TUITION AND REQUIRED FEES - Tuition is the amount of money charged to students for instructional services. Tuition may be charged per term, per course, or per credit.</p> <p>Required fees are fixed sum charged to students for items not covered by tuition and required of such a large proportion of all students that the student who does NOT pay the charge is an exception.</p> <p>UNDERGRADUATE - A student enrolled in a 4- or 5-year bachelor's degree program, an associate's degree program, or a vocational or technical program below the baccalaureate.</p> <p>FULL-TIME Undergraduate - A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, or 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term</p> <p>FIRST-TIME FIRST-YEAR STUDENT - A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term. Also includes students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school).</p> <p>FIRST-YEAR STUDENT A student who has completed less than the equivalent of 1 full year of undergraduate work; that is, less than 30 semester hours (in a 120-hour degree program) or less than 900 contact hours.</p> <p>ACADEMIC YEAR - The period of time generally extending from September to June; usually equated to 2 semesters or trimesters, 3 quarters, or the period covered by a 4-1-4 plan. Also included are "Other Academic calendar Systems" which is a category used to describe "non-traditional" calendar systems at 4-year and 2-year degree-granting institutions. These can include schools that offer primarily on-line courses or "one course at a time".</p>
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APPENDIX G

Noncompliance Citations Table – SACSCOC Accreditation Standards

Accreditation_standard	Off_Site	On_Site	Board
Total Numberofcitations	8089	1339	405
3_7_1Facultycompetence	451	138	23
3_3_1_1IEEducationalprograms	279	138	79
3_3_1_3IEAcademicandStudentSupport	246	86	35
3_3_1_2IEAdminSupportServices	235	87	34
3_3_1_5IECommunityPublicService	221	59	25
2_11_1FinancialResources	201	14	7
2_8Faculty	199	21	5
3_4_11Academicprogramcoordination	194	17	3
3_2_14Intellectualpropertyrights	189	8	0
3_7_2Facultyevaluation	187	31	4
3_5_1Generaleducationcompetencies	158	54	28
4_1Studentachievement	144	15	2
3_2_9Personnelappointment	141	8	5
3_2_10Administrativestaffevaluations	137	8	2
3_8_3Qualifiedstaff	135	14	4
2_5InstitutionalEffectiveness	128	14	3
3_5_4Terminaldegreesoffaculty	126	11	2
3_4_7Consortialrelationshipscontractualagreements	125	22	8
3_11_3Physicalfacilities	123	5	3
3_9_3Qualifiedstaff	119	8	2
3_13_3ComplaintProcedures	119	2	0
3_4_4Acceptanceofacademiccredit	114	8	3
3_2_13Institutionrelatedentities	113	8	0
3_13_1AccredDecisions	113	5	0
3_10_3Controloffinances	106	16	9
3_11_1Controlofphysicalresources	105	5	1
3_4_12Technologyuse	103	2	0
3_2_3Boardconflictointerest	101	1	0
4_7TitleIVprogramresponsibilities	100	13	3
4_9Definitionofcredithours	100	6	0
3_2_1CEOevaluationselection	97	7	4
3_4_6Practiciesforawardingcredit	97	9	1
3_2_5Boarddismissal	96	3	0
3_10_1Financialstability	94	34	29
3_12_1Substantivechange	92	19	4
3_3_1_4IEResearch	85	20	9
3_13_4aDERReview	85	7	0
3_8_1Learninginformationresources	85	5	0

APPENDIX G Continued

3_7_4Academicfreedom	84	2	1
3_7_5Facultyroleingovernance	83	5	4
3_1_1Mission	81	2	0
4_5Studentcomplaints	78	9	1
2_9LearningResourcesandServices	78	1	0
3_13_2CollaborativeArrangements	77	3	0
2_11_2PhysicalResources	76	0	0
3_5_2Institutionalcreditsforadegree	75	1	1
3_10_4Controlofspansoredresearchexternalfunds	74	6	3
4_8_2DEprivacy	72	7	0
3_4_8Noncredittocredit	71	1	1
3_2_8Qualifiedadministrativeacademicofficers	70	4	1
2_7_3GeneralEducation	69	11	0
3_8_2Instructionoflibraryuse	68	5	1
3_9_2Studentrecords	64	2	0
3_4_1Academicprogramapproval	63	1	3
3_10_2Financialaidaudits	62	2	1
3_11_2Institutionalenvironment	61	2	0
3_2_12Fundraisingactivities	60	3	0
3_14_1Publicationofaccreditationstatus	58	3	1
3_2_11Controlofintercollegiateathletics	53	1	0
3_4_9Academicssupportservices	52	4	1
3_2_4Externalinfluence	52	4	0
2_10StudentSupportServices	49	1	0
3_7_3Facultydevelopment	48	2	1
3_2_6Boardadministrationdistinction	48	0	0
3_4_3Admissionspolicies	46	0	0
3_4_5Academicpolicies	44	4	0
2_2GoverningBoard	44	0	0
3_4_10Responsibilityforcurriculum	41	1	3
4_4Programlength	41	5	1
3_9_1Studentrights	40	2	0
4_6Recruitmentmaterials	40	1	0
3_6_1Postbaccalaureateprogramrigor	36	2	1
2_7_4CourseWorkforDegrees	36	1	0
3_6_3Institutionalcreditsforgraduatedegree	35	2	1
3_5_3Undergraduateprogramrequirements	34	5	1
3_2_7Organizationalstructure	33	3	3
4_8_3DEfees	33	0	0
3_13_4bCorporate	31	7	10

APPENDIX G Continued

3_6_2Graduatecurriculum	30	0	0
3_13_5aBranch	27	1	0
2_7_1ProgramLength	22	3	0
3_2_2_3Boardpolicy	21	1	4
4_3Publicationofpolicies	21	0	0
2_4InstitutionalMission	19	1	0
2_7_2ProgramContent	19	1	0
4_8_1DEauthentication	19	0	0
3_2_2_1Boardmission	18	1	0
3_2_2_2Boardfiscalstability	16	1	0
3_6_4Postbaccalaureateprogramrequirements	14	1	1
4_2Programcurriculum	13	1	0
3_13_5bSeparateAccred	13	0	0
3_4_2Continuingeducationserviceprograms	11	1	0
2_1DegreegrantingAuthority	10	0	0
2_3ChiefExecutiveOfficer	7	1	3
1_1Integrity	2	0	1
2_6ContinuousOperation	2	0	0
3_3_2QEP	1	262	20
3_13_6PublicDisclosure	1	0	0
2_12QEP	0	16	0
3_13_7AccreditedStatus	0	0	0

APPENDIX H

Categorical Principal Component – Pattern Matrix^a

	Dimension								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3.7.2 Faculty evaluation	0.663	0.060	0.106	-0.106	0.140	0.043	-0.053	-0.047	-0.036
3.2.10 Administrative staff evaluations	0.426	0.059	-0.088	-0.010	0.132	-0.047	0.059	-0.076	0.073
3.4.11 Academic program coordination	0.415	0.153	0.065	-0.053	0.115	0.088	0.059	0.211	0.018
3.5.4 Terminal degrees of faculty	0.404	0.045	-0.019	-0.026	-0.038	0.039	0.148	0.117	-0.023
3.7.1 Faculty competence	0.394	0.126	0.178	-0.053	0.250	0.096	0.120	0.097	-0.020
3.2.9 Personnel appointment	0.322	-0.007	0.242	-0.173	0.150	-0.065	-0.067	-0.194	0.075
3.8.1 Learning/information resources	0.061	0.936	-0.034	-0.053	-0.002	-0.051	0.035	0.004	-0.057
2.9 Learning resources and services	0.047	0.924	0.015	-0.059	-0.050	-0.071	0.007	0.010	0.008
3.8.2 Instruction of library use	-0.080	0.784	0.009	0.008	0.055	0.093	0.081	-0.070	0.206
3.8.3 Qualified staff	-0.089	0.740	0.225	0.031	0.103	0.035	0.057	0.065	-0.116
3.4.12 Technology use	-0.063	0.485	0.146	-0.030	0.143	0.033	-0.033	0.127	0.005
3.10.2 Financial aid audits	-0.109	-0.012	0.984	0.031	0.012	-0.091	0.010	0.047	-0.006
47 TitleIV program responsibilities	0.088	0.068	0.936	0.028	0.057	0.021	0.024	-0.031	-0.024
3.13.5a Branch	0.032	0.054	-0.053	-1.007	-0.014	0.018	0.044	0.005	-0.049
3.13.5b Separate accred	-0.047	-0.013	-0.017	-1.002	0.037	0.007	-0.092	-0.009	-0.009
3.13.4b Corporate	0.061	-0.024	0.128	-0.431	0.109	-0.062	0.172	-0.211	0.026
3.13.3 Complaint procedures	-0.053	0.184	-0.075	-0.364	0.052	-0.140	-0.030	0.052	0.141
3.3.1.2 IE admin support services	0.008	0.044	0.020	-0.058	0.971	-0.010	-0.013	0.037	-0.016
3.3.1.3 IE academic and student support	-0.037	0.046	-0.017	-0.049	0.965	0.042	-0.006	0.010	-0.027
3.3.1.1 IE educational programs	-0.113	-0.073	0.114	0.037	0.871	0.093	-0.036	-0.080	-0.028
3.3.1.5 IE community public service	0.136	0.023	0.075	-0.034	0.837	-0.048	0.094	0.019	0.049
3.3.1.4 IE research	0.303	-0.118	-0.179	0.062	0.520	-0.137	0.209	0.197	0.191
2.5 Institutional effectiveness	-0.057	0.114	0.017	-0.002	0.472	0.084	0.060	0.061	-0.082
3.5.1 General education competencies	-0.142	-0.081	-0.053	-0.073	0.374	-0.118	0.249	0.034	-0.044
2.10 Student support services	0.087	-0.035	-0.034	-0.083	0.044	0.910	0.007	-0.039	0.035
3.6.4 Post-baccalaureate program requirements	-0.083	-0.024	-0.073	0.035	0.021	0.676	0.045	0.018	-0.119
3.4.9 Academic support services	-0.040	0.092	-0.014	0.025	0.177	0.495	-0.042	0.201	0.130

APPENDIX H Continued

	Dimension									
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2.7.1 Program length	0.991	0.009	-0.059	-0.076	0.004	-0.048	-0.022	0.051	0.035	0.039
4.4 Program length	0.963	-0.020	0.010	-0.002	-0.022	0.009	0.065	0.005	0.015	-0.068
4.8.3 DE fees	-0.006	0.838	-0.006	0.041	-0.075	-0.038	-0.122	-0.087	0.052	0.107
4.8.1 DE authentication	0.032	0.799	-0.002	0.017	0.078	0.225	0.032	0.081	-0.028	0.015
4.8.2 DE privacy	0.072	0.648	0.041	0.006	-0.045	-0.048	0.151	0.111	-0.074	-0.039
2.2 Governing Board	0.010	0.089	0.803	-0.098	0.104	0.122	-0.059	0.118	0.000	0.003
3.2.1 CEO evaluation selection	0.134	-0.051	0.484	0.258	0.023	-0.010	-0.020	-0.213	-0.070	-0.067
3.2.3 Board conflict of interest	0.130	-0.056	0.368	-0.234	0.046	0.127	-0.069	-0.081	-0.057	-0.006
3.2.11 Control of intercollegiate athletics	0.113	-0.037	-0.012	-0.954	-0.024	-0.005	-0.012	-0.085	-0.015	-0.059
3.2.12 Fund raising activities	0.021	-0.059	0.008	-0.800	-0.019	-0.003	0.050	0.127	0.022	0.270
3.2.4 External influence	0.010	0.125	0.397	-0.490	0.110	0.051	-0.011	0.142	0.019	-0.214
2.4 Institutional mission	-0.001	-0.051	0.016	0.047	0.985	-0.101	-0.020	0.119	-0.009	0.064
3.1.1 Mission	0.000	0.033	0.022	-0.031	0.840	-0.043	-0.061	0.043	-0.131	-0.047
3.13.2 Collaborative arrangements	-0.023	0.165	0.025	-0.030	0.430	0.022	0.075	-0.261	0.024	0.105
2.3 Chief executive officer	0.011	0.086	0.112	0.059	-0.086	0.978	-0.093	0.014	-0.030	0.103
3.2.2.3 Board policy	-0.089	-0.017	-0.105	-0.191	-0.062	0.724	0.108	0.085	-0.016	-0.224
2.7.2 Program content	0.028	-0.004	-0.032	0.012	-0.073	-0.036	0.977	-0.153	-0.004	0.047
3.5.3 Undergraduate program requirements	0.075	-0.018	-0.305	-0.062	0.079	-0.066	0.629	0.137	-0.034	-0.145
3.6.2 Graduate curriculum	-0.066	0.003	-0.079	0.053	-0.095	-0.029	0.097	-0.980	-0.022	0.009
3.6.1 Post-baccalaureate program rigor	0.107	-0.083	0.119	-0.120	-0.021	-0.057	0.045	-0.791	0.000	0.086
3.13.6 Public disclosure	0.029	-0.021	-0.017	-0.004	-0.102	-0.060	-0.015	0.047	0.969	-0.014
2.1 Degree-granting authority	-0.013	0.036	0.008	-0.031	0.043	0.028	0.024	-0.047	-0.011	0.992

APPENDIX H Continued

	Dimension									
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
3.13.4a DE review	-0.178	-0.056	0.060	-0.122	0.167	0.208	0.047	-0.084	-0.023	-0.054
3.2.13 Institution-related entities	0.687	-0.256	-0.076	0.127	-0.002	-0.058	-0.069	-0.083	-0.006	-0.010
3.2.7 Organizational structure	-0.466	0.183	0.021	0.260	-0.004	-0.049	-0.159	-0.014	0.040	-0.010
3.2.5 Board dismissal	0.407	-0.003	-0.021	-0.097	-0.081	0.041	0.045	-0.060	-0.055	0.075
4.5 Student complaints	0.127	-0.677	0.071	0.009	0.054	0.002	-0.072	-0.022	-0.081	-0.099
4.2 Program curriculum	-0.113	-0.540	0.035	-0.176	-0.021	-0.017	0.027	-0.009	0.039	0.029
3.7.5 Faculty role in governance	-0.021	-0.016	0.723	0.007	-0.094	-0.005	0.152	-0.085	-0.052	0.109
3.4.10 Responsibility for curriculum	-0.048	-0.048	0.653	0.132	0.287	-0.105	0.025	0.089	-0.045	0.081
2.7.4 Course work for degrees	0.012	0.030	0.443	-0.182	-0.171	0.146	0.032	-0.377	-0.002	-0.026
4.6 Recruitment materials	0.201	0.072	0.366	0.272	-0.045	-0.302	0.111	0.299	-0.052	-0.012
2.6 Continuous operation	0.010	-0.028	0.035	0.969	0.037	0.090	0.069	-0.060	0.042	0.130
3.4.2 Continuing education service programs	-0.027	0.022	0.036	0.018	0.952	0.002	0.047	-0.011	-0.006	-0.050
1.1 Integrity	0.066	0.110	-0.054	0.086	0.434	-0.067	-0.144	-0.228	-0.038	-0.094
2.8 Faculty	0.131	-0.123	0.101	-0.072	0.318	-0.096	0.124	-0.034	-0.021	0.184
3.4.3 Admissions policies	0.084	0.127	0.175	-0.099	0.049	-0.653	-0.018	-0.020	-0.061	-0.017
3.11.2 Institutional environment	-0.121	-0.234	-0.095	-0.014	0.128	-0.549	0.087	-0.027	-0.035	-0.021
3.4.7 Consortial relationships/contractual agreements	-0.089	-0.050	-0.009	-0.094	0.019	-0.373	-0.056	-0.132	-0.014	0.288
2.7.3 General education	0.070	0.058	0.157	0.057	0.126	0.029	0.760	0.053	0.013	-0.128
4.9 Definition of credit hours	-0.356	-0.152	-0.034	0.073	0.013	0.056	0.482	0.036	-0.022	0.151
3.4.6 Practices for awarding credit	-0.389	0.009	-0.023	0.062	-0.061	-0.039	0.438	0.091	-0.019	0.021
3.12.1 Substantive change	0.043	-0.080	0.008	0.060	0.075	-0.044	-0.117	-0.802	0.018	-0.002
3.13.1 Accred decisions	0.198	-0.008	-0.221	0.149	0.136	0.013	0.275	-0.441	-0.160	0.146
3.4.1 Academic program approval	0.133	-0.059	0.255	0.166	0.214	0.166	-0.072	0.332	-0.034	-0.059
2.12 QEP	0.070	0.034	-0.009	0.073	-0.020	0.010	0.023	-0.017	1.013	-0.022
3.3.2 QEP	-0.047	-0.092	0.044	-0.031	0.041	-0.030	0.067	-0.036	0.934	0.041
3.2.2.2 Board fiscal stability	-0.027	0.084	0.030	0.095	-0.056	0.014	-0.084	0.017	-0.026	0.980

APPENDIX H Continued

	Dimension									
	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
3.2.2.1 Board mission	0.953	0.029	-0.056	0.058	-0.010	0.090	0.025	0.035	-0.035	0.012
4.3 Publication of policies	-0.117	-0.659	-0.071	0.063	0.099	-0.040	-0.001	-0.017	-0.006	-0.236
3.5.2 Institutional credits for a degree	-0.103	0.419	-0.104	0.411	0.095	0.138	-0.119	0.085	-0.364	-0.079
2.11.2 Physical resources	-0.188	0.033	0.667	0.053	0.056	0.030	-0.046	0.135	-0.147	0.082
3.11.3 Physical facilities	-0.034	0.058	0.618	-0.036	0.029	0.209	0.013	0.006	-0.142	-0.050
3.2.6 Board/administration distinction	0.189	0.156	0.383	0.041	0.119	-0.087	-0.030	0.008	0.251	-0.048
3.2.8 Qualified administrative/academic officers	0.194	0.047	0.117	0.813	0.018	-0.009	0.114	-0.030	-0.153	0.068
3.9.1 Student rights	-0.087	-0.075	-0.022	0.547	-0.071	-0.097	-0.058	0.065	0.308	-0.067
3.9.3 Qualified staff	-0.020	-0.077	-0.083	0.538	0.114	0.165	-0.107	0.064	0.157	-0.093
3.6.3 Institutional credits for a graduate degree	-0.157	0.093	0.064	0.452	-0.049	0.121	-0.071	0.130	-0.392	-0.226
3.4.8 Noncredit to credit	0.013	-0.019	0.004	0.004	0.876	0.021	-0.098	-0.015	-0.042	-0.016
3.4.4 Acceptance of academic credit	-0.066	-0.122	-0.023	0.068	0.462	0.046	-0.125	0.291	0.074	0.036
3.2.14 Intellectual property rights	-0.018	-0.241	-0.090	0.240	0.267	-0.022	0.044	0.007	0.235	-0.006
3.10.4 Control of sponsored research/external funds	0.024	0.073	0.022	0.064	-0.110	0.818	-0.062	-0.017	0.003	0.100
3.10.3 Control of finances	0.172	-0.027	-0.043	-0.082	0.153	0.720	-0.257	-0.075	-0.086	-0.005
3.11.1 Control of physical resources	0.101	-0.015	0.173	-0.089	0.068	0.566	-0.138	0.091	0.088	-0.219
3.10.1 Financial stability	-0.015	-0.032	-0.025	-0.087	0.037	0.084	-0.974	0.018	-0.044	0.006
2.11.1 Financial resources	-0.080	0.156	-0.018	0.052	0.025	0.148	-0.583	0.111	0.060	0.072
3.7.3 Faculty development	0.080	-0.035	0.054	-0.012	-0.073	-0.022	-0.099	0.901	-0.067	-0.105
3.7.4 Academic freedom	-0.018	0.163	0.014	0.098	0.255	-0.073	0.147	0.444	0.135	0.204
3.4.5 Academic policies	-0.098	0.155	-0.214	0.156	-0.255	-0.006	0.016	0.319	-0.146	0.163
4.1 Student achievement	-0.018	0.042	-0.046	-0.002	-0.179	0.016	-0.110	-0.069	0.435	-0.151
3.14.1 Publication of accreditation status	-0.030	0.425	-0.102	0.066	-0.020	-0.145	-0.068	-0.075	0.131	-0.443
3.9.2 Student records	0.035	-0.009	0.053	0.142	-0.071	0.130	0.070	0.057	0.235	-0.439

Variable Principal Normalization.

a. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.