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# Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

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Contact: Beth Sibolski, (267) 284-5030

Middle States Commission  
on Higher Education  
MSCHE

New England Association  
of Schools and Colleges  
Commission on  
Institutions of Higher  
Education  
NEASCCIHE

Higher Learning  
Commission  
of the North Central  
Association of Colleges  
and Schools  
HLCNCA

Northwest Commission  
on Colleges and  
Universities  
NWCCU

Southern Association  
of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
SACSCOC

Accrediting Commission  
for Community and  
Junior Colleges,  
Western Association of  
Schools and Colleges  
ACCJC/WASC

WASC Senior College  
and University  
Commission  
WSCUC

## Regional Accreditors Announce Efforts to Improve Public Understanding of Commission Actions

Washington, DC –The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) today announced plans to implement a common framework and understanding of terms for key actions regarding accredited institutions.

“As regional accreditation evolved over the years, unique descriptions were developed to identify varying levels of concern regarding the accreditation status of individual colleges and universities. At a time when more institutions are operating on a national scale, these terms have, at times, resulted in confusion among students and the general public in cases when actions have been taken,” said Beth Sibolski, Chair of C-RAC and President of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

To address this issue, Sibolski announced, beginning this year, that the terms “Warning, Probation, Show Cause, Withdrawal of Accreditation, Denial of Accreditation, and Appeal” will be consistent across regions. “This is an important step in improving the information accreditors provide – information critical for students in making decisions about their academic future and important in promoting better public understanding of the accreditation status of institutions,” added Sibolski.

“One of the key strengths of regional accreditation is its ability to share best practices among the Commissions and build upon them,” said Sylvia Manning, Vice-Chair of C-RAC and President of the Higher Learning Commission. “This effort also demonstrates how the higher education community is able to come together to address issues rather than relying on a legislative or regulatory solution,” Manning added.

“We are very pleased with this announcement and the efforts of C-RAC, which reflect one of the key recommendations from *Assuring Academic Quality in the 21st Century: Self-Regulation in a New Era*, a report released by ACE’s National Taskforce on Institutional Accreditation,” said Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education. “As noted in our report, a frequent complaint about accreditation is the use of different language and terminology to describe similar things. C-RAC has made a huge step in addressing this issue,” added Broad.

A description of the terms and definitions follows.

**REGIONAL ACCREDITATION:  
WARNING, PROBATION, WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

The seven regional accrediting commissions share a common framework and a common understanding of terms for certain actions regarding accredited institutions: Warning, Probation, Show Cause, Withdrawal of Accreditation, Denial of Accreditation, and Appeal.

**Public Sanctions:**

- **Warning:** Indicates that an institution has been determined by the commission<sup>1</sup> not to meet one or more standards<sup>2</sup> for accreditation.
- **Probation:** Indicates that an institution has been determined by the commission not to meet one or more standards for accreditation and is an indication of a serious concern on the part of the Commission regarding the level and/or scope of non-compliance issues related to the standards.

By federal regulation, the Commission must take immediate action to withdraw accreditation if an institution is out of compliance with accreditation standards for two years unless the time is extended for good cause.

**Show cause:** An institution is asked to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. A written report from the institution and, if specified by the commission, a focused visit are preliminary to a hearing with the commission. Show cause may occur during or at the end of the two-year probation period, or at any time a commission determines that an institution must demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn (i.e., probation is not a necessary precursor to show cause).

**Withdrawal of Accreditation:** An institution's accredited status is withdrawn, and with it, membership in the association.

**Denial of Accreditation:** An institution is denied initial accreditation because it does not meet the requirements for accreditation.

**Appeal:** The withdrawal or denial of accreditation may be appealed. Institutions remain accredited (or candidates for initial accreditation) during the period of the appeal.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commission* encompasses decisions made by any appropriate decision-making body of one of the seven regional accrediting bodies.

<sup>2</sup> *Standards* encompasses any requirements for accreditation, including eligibility requirements, standards, criteria, or policies of the commission.