



March 7, 2019

Dr. Michael Lomax
President
United Negro College Fund
1805 7th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Dr. Lomax:

I am writing to you in response to comments you made yesterday at the luncheon celebrating the 75th anniversary of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). I watched a video of your presentation where you expressed concerns about the decision made by the Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) regarding the accreditation of Bennett College and other member institutions. You also took the opportunity to quote comments – out of context – that I made in a recent publication to justify the fifth priority in UNCF's legislative agenda. It is for those two reasons I am writing to you today.

First of all, as reported in the *Inside Higher Ed* article you quoted, I did say that many more small and private institutions would either close or lose accreditation over the next ten years; however, I am not the first or only observer of this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, yesterday morning's *Inside Higher Ed* identified three colleges in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont, all of which are outside of my region, that announced impending closings at the end of this academic year. Additionally, in another article in the December 20, 2017, edition of *Inside Higher Ed*, Dr. Alvin Schexnider, a former HBCU president in the Southern region, mentioned that the former president of Morehouse College, your own *alma mater*, said in 1986 that, "History has shown that the private black college experiences a very slow death...you will have an increasing number of weak private colleges lose accreditation, and they will lose enrollment, and then they will lose financial stability...."

Second, for you to suggest that the fact that I, as President of an accrediting body, making the statement would bias the 77-member SACSCOC Board members' decision-making is beyond absurd and I'm offended for them. I assure you, the institutional presidents and public representatives are quite capable of making their own decisions. Moreover, their deliberations are equitable and in accordance with our established *Principles of Accreditation* and processes.

The reality is that institutions similar to Paine College and Bennett College with small endowments, decreasing enrollments, mounting debts, and high tuition discount rates will not be able to meet accreditation standards of ANY accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, not just those of SACSCOC. These crippling factors debilitate smaller institutions long before they undergo the accreditation review process. Incidentally, every institution SACSCOC has removed from membership has failed during litigation to demonstrate that the Commission did not follow its procedures OR that institutions were treated unfairly.



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Given their history, the majority of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), are disproportionately located within the SACSCOC region. While they constitute approximately 74% of all HBCUs in the United States, they only constitute 9% of the membership that comprises SACSCOC. Additionally, in the 14.5 years that I have been CEO of SACSCOC, we have only dropped a total of 10 institutions and the majority of those were not HBCUs.

Furthermore, in the last 30 years, the Commission has dropped a TOTAL of 30 institutions of which 13 were HBCUs. I am perplexed, therefore, that you would propose that SACSCOC has made a concerted effort to adversely affect the accreditation of HBCUs. If that were the case, how do you explain the fact that 64, or 85%, of our HBCU members currently MEET and MAINTAIN compliance with our accreditation standards?

I must tell you how extremely disappointed I am that you chose to make your statements without ever contacting me to either gather facts about the accrediting process or to express any concerns you had about our accreditation process, or me personally. As higher education colleagues, my wish is that we would speak frankly to each other, BEFORE, misquoting one another in public.

I am taking this opportunity to copy members of the United States Congress, and the CEOs of both NAFEO and The Thurgood Marshall Fund who were reportedly in attendance at the luncheon, as well as the Presidents of all HBCUs located in the Southern region and members of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees so that they have a balanced view of these issues.

As always, I am available to discuss any issue you have related to the process used to accredit institutions within the Southern region, and regional accreditation in general.

Sincerely,

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

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.
President

BSW:rb

cc: The Honorable Robert Scott
The Honorable Alma Adams
The Honorable Tim Kaine
Dr. Harry Williams
Ms. Leslie Baskerville, J.D.
Presidents of SACSCOC member HBCUs
Members of SACSCOC Board of Trustees
Members of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)
Inside Higher Ed