Preparing for the 2027

SACSCOC FIFTH-YEAR INTERIM REPORT

HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact dmiles@email.sc.edu or
803-777-9088 for more information

go.sc.edu/sacscoc

UNIVERSITY OF South Carolina

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What is the Fifth-Year Interim Report?

The Fifth-Year Interim Report is a key component of the University of South Carolina's ongoing accreditation relationship with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Submitted midway through USC's 10-year reaffirmation cycle, the report allows the university to demonstrate continued compliance with accreditation standards and to reflect on institutional effectiveness and student success. USC is scheduled to submit its next Fifth-Year Interim Report in 2027.

SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE REPORT

While SACSCOC conducts a comprehensive reaffirmation review every ten years, the U.S. Department of Education requires accrediting agencies to monitor their member institutions more frequently. This requirement ensures that institutions receiving federal funds continue to meet accreditation standards between reaffirmation cycles. In response, SACSCOC developed the Fifth-Year Interim Report as a structured, midpoint review that provides assurance of ongoing compliance and quality.

The Fifth-Year Interim Report is an abbreviated compliance report that focuses on select standards from the Principles of Accreditation, with particular emphasis on student achievement and institutional effectiveness. In addition, the report includes an Impact Report that documents the implementation and outcomes of USC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Together, these components provide evidence that USC is fulfilling its mission, supporting student learning, and engaging in continuous improvement.

PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH-YEAR REVIEW

Preparation of the Fifth-Year Interim Report is a collective effort involving faculty, staff, and administrators across the university. The process offers USC an opportunity to take stock of key programs and services, evaluate progress since the last reaffirmation, and highlight meaningful improvements. Although compliance with accreditation standards is central, the ultimate focus of the report is on students and ensuring that they receive a high-quality educational experience and that their degrees carry lasting value.

Once submitted, the Fifth-Year Interim Report is reviewed off-site by a committee of SACSCOC peer evaluators who assess USC's compliance in a manner similar to the 10-year reaffirmation review. The review committee includes evaluators with expertise in institutional effectiveness, student services, academic programs, and finance.

Off-campus instructional sites that have been added since USC's last reaffirmation may also undergo an Interim Off-Campus Instructional Site Committee visit, which evaluates areas such as faculty qualifications, student services, learning resources, facilities, administrative oversight, and student learning outcomes in comparison to similar programs on the main campus.

Accreditation by SACSCOC plays a vital role in maintaining public confidence in higher education. It ensures that USC meets a common set of standards shared by accredited institutions nationwide. For students, accreditation means eligibility for federal financial aid, the transferability of credits, and recognition of USC degrees as credible and valuable. The Fifth-Year Interim Report is therefore more than a regulatory requirement—it is a meaningful checkpoint that reinforces USC's commitment to excellence, accountability, and student success.

The Fifth-Year Interim Report is divided into five parts:

I. Signatures Attesting to Integrity
(applicable to all institutions)

II. Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews
(applicable to all institutions)

III. Fifth-Year Compliance Certification
(applicable to all institutions)

IV. Fifth-Year Follow-Up
(applicable to select institutions)

V. Impact Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan
(applicable to all institutions)

Standards Addressed in the Compliance Certification

- 5.4 - Qualified Administrative and Academic Officers
- 6.1 - Full-Time Faculty Members
- 6.2.b - Program Faculty
- 6.2.c - Program Coordination
- 8.1 - Student Achievement
- 8.2.a - Student Outcomes
- 9.1 - Program Content
- 9.2 - Program Length
- 10.2 - Public Information
- 10.3 - Archived Information
- 10.5 - Admissions Policies and Practices
- 10.6 - Distance and Correspondence Education
  - a. - Student Identity Verification
  - b. - Protecting Student Privacy
  - c. - Written Notification of Additional Charges
- 10.7 - Policies for Awarding Credit
- 10.9 - Cooperative Academic Agreements
- 12.1 - Academic and Student Support Services
- 12.4 - Student Complaints
- 13.6 - Federal and State Responsibilities
- 13.7 - Physical Resources
- 13.8 - Institutional Environment
- 14.1 - Publication of Accreditation Status
- 14.3 - Comprehensive Institutional Review
- 14.4 - Representation to Other Agencies
- QEP Impact Report

Timeline to Submission

First Draft Due
March 31, 2026

Second Draft Due
May 29, 2026

Third Draft Due
July 31, 2026

Final Draft Due
September 30, 2026

OIRAA Final Review
Nov. 2026 - Jan. 2027

Report Due to SACSCOC
March 2027

OIRAA will provide University Compliance Updates in April, June, and October of 2026

Guidelines for Writing, Documentation, and Evidence

WRITING EFFECTIVE NARRATIVE RESPONSES

The Fifth-Year Interim Report requires clear, concise, and well-documented narratives that demonstrate the University of South Carolina's continued compliance with selected SACSCOC standards. Although the report is more focused than the 10-year reaffirmation, expectations for clarity, alignment, and evidence remain high. The goal is not to describe everything USC does, but to provide targeted and well-supported responses that directly address each standard.

When drafting narrative responses keep the following guidelines in mind:

Write for an external audience.

SACSCOC reviewers are peer evaluators who rely solely on the submitted narrative and evidence to determine compliance. Avoid assuming institutional knowledge, unexplained acronyms, or USC-specific jargon. Define specialized terms as needed.

Address each standard directly and explicitly.

Use the language of the standard and clearly explain how USC meets the requirement.

Demonstrate implementation and effectiveness.

Show not only that policies and procedures exist, but that they are actively used, assessed, and improved over time.

Connect practices to student outcomes whenever possible.

Link institutional processes to student achievement, learning outcomes, or service effectiveness to reinforce impact.

Follow a clear and consistent structure.

Strong narratives typically include:

1. A clear statement addressing the standard
2. A concise explanation of relevant policies, processes, or practices
3. Direct references to evidence that demonstrate implementation and effectiveness

BEST PRACTICES FOR USING DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE

Documentation and evidence are essential to demonstrating compliance and should be selected intentionally to help support the narrative. The emphasis should be on quality and relevance rather than volume.

Selecting Appropriate Evidence

- Use current and relevant documentation.
- Choose evidence that reinforces specific claims.
- When possible, include evidence of implementation and results.
- Avoid draft, outdated, or misaligned materials.

Presenting and Referencing Evidence

- Label and organize documentation clearly.
- Reference evidence explicitly in the narrative.
- Ensure consistency between narrative and evidence.
- Review narratives and evidence together before submission.

EMPHASIZING CLARITY, ACCURACY, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Successful Fifth-Year Interim Reports are characterized by transparency and a clear commitment to continuous improvement. Narratives should be factual and reflective. Our aim is to acknowledge progress while clearly demonstrating compliance.

Ultimately, the Fifth-Year Interim Report is both a compliance document and a communication tool. Clear narratives supported by strong, well-aligned evidence help reviewers understand USC's practices and reduce the likelihood of follow-up questions.

WORKING IN ONE DRIVE

To support the development of the Fifth-Year Interim Report, each assigned standard has a dedicated OneDrive folder. These folders are designed to streamline collaboration, ensure version control, and make the writing and documentation process as efficient as possible for contributors.

Within each folder, contributors will find a working narrative document that includes the material submitted during USC's 10-year Reaffirmation in 2021, along with a folder for supporting documentation. Contributors are not expected to begin writing from scratch; instead, you may review, update, and build upon the existing narrative as appropriate to reflect current practices and outcomes.

OneDrive serves as the primary workspace for drafting and collaboration, allowing contributors to track changes, work simultaneously, and collaborate directly in the document. For contributors who worked on the 2021 Reaffirmation, this approach replaces the earlier drafting limitations of Compliance Assist and supports a more efficient drafting and review process.

Access to Compliance Assist may still be needed to view embedded links or the originally submitted reaffirmation content. Contributors can access Compliance Assist through the link provided in the working document or by visiting sc.compliance-assist.com. If additional access is needed, please contact OIRAA.

Contributors will receive an email notification when access to their OneDrive folder has been granted. Individuals working on multiple standards will receive separate emails for each assigned standard, each containing a direct link to the appropriate folder. When making updates, contributors are encouraged to use Track Changes to clearly identify revisions for review.

OIRAA will manage the final linking and embedding of supporting documentation towards the end of the drafting process. PDFs or other materials should be saved in the Supporting Documentation folder, and contributors may leave comments in the narrative document to alert OIRAA to items that need to be embedded.

SACSCOC Fifth-Year Interim Executive Committee

- Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
- Anna Edwards, Chief of Staff, Office of the President
- Caroline Agardy, Vice President for Human Resources
- Craig Wilson, Chancellor of Palmetto College
- Brice Bible, Vice President for Information Technology & Chief Information Officer
- Rex Tolliver, Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support
- Ed Walton, Executive Vice President for Administration and Chief Financial Officer
- Terry Parham, General Counsel and Executive Director of Compliance Programs
- Trena Houp, Executive Director, Academic Program Planning and Decision Support
- Lara Lomicka Anderson, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Interim Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
- Scott Verzyl, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Undergraduate Admissions
- Donald Miles, Associate Vice Provost for Institutional Intelligence and Accreditation, and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison (Chair)

Questions? Contact OIRAA!

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ABOUT YOUR ACCREDITATION LIASION

Donald Miles is the Associate Vice Provost for Institutional Intelligence and Accreditation, the Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA), and serves as the university's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison. He leads a team responsible for aggregating data, academic analysis, assessment, institutional effectiveness, accreditation, and analytics for USC Columbia and the USC System.

He has held various leadership roles within OIRAA and contributed to numerous university committees. Donald is a past president of the South Carolina Association for Institutional Research (SCAIR).

Before joining OIRAA in 2012, he worked at Aiken Technical College and USC Aiken. He holds an MPA from Augusta State University and a BA in Political Science from USC Aiken.