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Southern accreditor strips St. Paul's of recognition

Submitted by Scott Jaschik on June 22, 2012 - 3:00am

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools announced Thursday that it has removed the accreditation of Saint Paul's College, a historically black college in Virginia.

While accreditors regularly place colleges on warning or probation, or give them marching orders to deal with certain issues, the revocation of accreditation for a longstanding college (Saint Paul's was founded in 1888) is relatively rare and can have extreme consequences. Students can participate in federal student aid programs only if they are enrolled at accredited institutions. Most colleges -- and particularly those like Saint Paul's, where most students are from low-income families -- cannot survive without being eligible for students to receive aid.

Saint Paul's students can continue to receive federal aid during an appeal process that the college vowed Thursday to pursue.

The college acknowledged the seriousness of the situation by [announcing](#) ^[1] that it has created a "transition committee" to help students who may want "to solidify their plans for the fall" by transferring elsewhere.

SACS officials cited a series of areas where Saint Paul's had been found deficient -- even after two years on probation during which the college had been told it had to improve. Among the areas SACS cited were violations concerning financial resources, institutional effectiveness in support services, institutional effectiveness in academics and student services, lack of terminal degrees for too many faculty members, and a lack of financial stability.

Most historically black colleges in the country are located in the region SACS accredits, and many times that SACS announces actions involving colleges, black colleges figure prominently. Grambling University, Paine College and Virginia University were placed on warning this week, while Jarvis Christian University and Southern University at Shreveport were continued on warning status. Other historically black colleges received good news from SACS. Tougaloo College was removed from probation, and Stillman College and Savannah State University were removed from warning.

As with every time SACS votes to punish or lift sanctions on colleges, there were also many actions that did not involve historically black colleges. Among the noteworthy actions this meeting: [Edison State College](#) ^[2] was placed on probation (following a scandal over whether it was adhering to its own academic standards) and [Our Lady of Holy Cross College](#) ^[3] saw its probation lifted (its status had been questioned after its president and board members were all

forced out).

At Saint Paul's on Thursday, all campus employees gathered in the auditorium to hear the news. (There is no summer session this year, so there aren't students around.)

Kimberly Tetlow, vice president for institutional advancement at the college, said in an interview that many of her colleagues were very upset at the beginning of the meeting. But she added that "we walked out of that auditorium swinging. We realized, 'Wait a minute, we're not done.' "

Tetlow acknowledged that the college has a long history of "hand to mouth" finances, although it has recently made major progress in fund-raising. But she said she worried that the financial standards used by SACS might not recognize the realities of historically black colleges.

"We serve the underserved," she said. "Historically black colleges are underfunded compared to many other colleges, and because of that, the problems we face are different." She said it was important to look at the record of success without much money, not just the relatively small budgets. "For 124 years, I don't think we ever could have sat down the year before and said how much money we'd have the next year. But for 124 years, we've made it. We've been through much worse times."

Belle S. Wheelan, the president of SACS' Commission on Colleges, said that in her seven years there, two of the four institutions that have been stripped of accreditation have been historically black colleges. (The other is Paul Quinn College, which is now accredited by the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools.)

She said that when colleges are on probation, "they have the same length of time to pull it off," and that this is true of historically black colleges and other institutions. "We treat everybody the same," she said.

Diversity ^[4]

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Links:

[1] <http://saintpaulsnet.com/?p=3313>

[2] <http://www.news-press.com/article/20120621/NEWS0104/120621003/Edison-State-College-placed-probation-by-accrediting-agency?odyssey=nav|head>

[3] http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2012/06/post_166.html

[4] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/diversity>