SACS Warns S.C. State

Contributed by Dervedia Thomas -- Black College Wire
Tuesday, 30 December 2008

Accrediting body finds failure to comply with requirements

South Carolina State University has been placed on warning for 12 months by its accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, for failure to comply with the commission's core requirements.

The Dec 18. sanction was given following a report from the special committee assigned to review S.C. State's governance and intercollegiate athletics. If the university fails to improve during this period it faces the threat of probation, removal of accreditation or an extension of its warning period. The warning accuses the board of trustees of not giving the university president and faculty enough room to run the institution, its intercollegiate athletics and fund raising. It also states that the institution must show evidence that the board of trustees is not controlled by a minority of board members.

The activities of S.C. State's board came into question after the widely publicized firing of President Andrew Huginie Jr. in 2007. Hugine is now suing the university as well as current and former board members for defamation and conspiracy.

The suit singles out former board chairman Maurice Washington as being instrumental in the alleged conspiracy. Washington, who has continually dismissed these allegations by Hugine, is being challenged for his seat on the board by the president of S.C. State's alumni chapter, Patricia Lott, as well as Bill Goodwin Jr., another alumnus.

Students learned about the SACS action during their winter break, and many are upset. "Our institution has been playing dodgeball with SACS for years," said senior Business Management major Terrance Sean Porcher. "This time around, we just got hit with the ball."

Porcher also said that the warning will light a fire under our stakeholders that will cause drastic changes to our campus -- changes that will either benefit us greatly or bring us down in "a whole bunch of confusion."

Others, including sophomore business management major Kirsten Pratt, are concerned about the impact on their degrees. "This warning scares me," Pratt said.

"I'm not sure how fast a warning can be turned into something more serious, something dangerous threatening my degree. I would hate for S.C. State not to get their stuff straight, and therefore I would have wasted two or more years of my time and money."

Shavonne Slocum an international student and general scholar, also expressed concerns, about her lack of options if things were to "fall apart."

She noted, "It is not that simple for us [international students] to transfer to another school.
I am also concerned about other students [local and out-of-state] who don't have the scores to go to USC or another school, and S.C. State is all they can afford."

Senior English major DeAnna James remained optimistic.

"Although the warning is unfortunate, S.C. State will persevere as it always has, building a legacy of knowledge, duty and honor," James said, adding that students must continue to pray for the best and keep the faith.

S.C. State released the following statement in response to the SACS warning. "The University and its governing body are greatly concerned by this action; however, the public warning issued by SACS does not impact the University's current accreditation status."

In the response, the University also said it pledges its full commitment to take appropriate actions to fully address all cities issues.

Other HBCUs issued sanctions by SACS in December include Alabama A&M University, and Texas Southern University. Both institutions are on probation with the latter having its probationary period extended for six months. Florida A&M University's probation was lifted in September 2008.

S.C. State is up for re-accreditation by SACS in 2010.

View SACS full disclosure statement.

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Dervedia Thomas is editor in chief of The Collegian, the South Carolina State University student newspaper, which originally published this article.