

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Southeastern on Probation

Wake Forest, NC - Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary was placed on probation by its regional accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). This decision follows two years of warning by the agency.

Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana December 4 - 6, a commission from the accrediting agency decided that continued difficulties at Southeastern warranted placing the seminary on probation. A special SACS on-site committee had visited the Wake Forest, NC campus in October and had sited eight criteria they felt were not in compliance with SACS standards.

Several of the committee's criteria related to planning and evaluation. They specifically asked the school to demonstrate that it was in compliance with condition 11 of SACS's Conditions of Eligibility, which deals with the seminary's mechanism for long-range planning and evaluation. This had been the first time that a on-site team had questioned any criteria related to eligibility.

Dr. Lewis A. Drummond, president, Dr. L. Russ Bush, vice president for academic affairs/dean of the faculty, and Roger Ellsworth, chairman of the board of trustees, went to New Orleans to present additional information and answer questions from the commission. They were given approximately 45 minutes before the panel of SACS representatives.

Drummond was notified, by phone, of the commission's decision late Thursday evening at his home by David Carter, the assistant director of SACS. Carter said that the commission had cited the seminary on four criteria and had felt that probation would give the school the additional time needed for them to clear up these final difficulties.

The criteria that the commission cited related to two areas, that of planning and evaluation and trustee involvement in the faculty selection process.

Drummond said, "We take this very seriously and are disappointed with the commission's decision. However, this is not the loss of accreditation. We were delighted to see that we have satisfied SACS's concern about whether or not we were eligible for accreditation."

In a letter addressed to students, Drummond explained the news concerning probation. He also gave them his views as to what probation means for the seminary. Drummond stressed that the school would address the remaining SACS criteria forthrightly and energetically. He stated that the difficulties cited could be addressed easily within the time frame granted by probation.

He reminded students that probation is not the equivalent of loss of accreditation. He also reassured them that there was no need to fear about the quality of their education. Additionally, Drummond said, "All students who enter the seminary while still accredited will graduate with an accredited degree."

Students were reminded that the school is also accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the seminary's national, professional accrediting agency. Drummond said, "All of this means we are still a fully accredited institution, and we have every reason to believe we will continue to be so."

Russ Bush, dean of the faculty, said he felt that most of the remaining concerns could be addressed very rapidly and expressed optimism that the school's probation might be short. He said, "We have another on-site visit in April for our ten-year self study. If we have the matters related to our accreditation in order, the on-site team will recommend that we be reaffirmed."

Bush further stated, "According to SACS guidelines, probation could last for up to two years, but there is no doubt in my mind that we will have the commission's concerns cleared up well before that time."

As expected, reaction by faculty and students was mixed. Some said that they felt this decision by the accrediting agency was inevitable, due to the continued concerns expressed by the SACS on-site team in October. Others conveyed hopes that the probation would be quickly resolved so the school could "get back to business."

Dr. Maurice Robinson, associate professor of New Testament, a Southeastern alumnus who was added to the faculty in August said, "Southeastern was not accredited by SACS when I came here as a student, nor did they have it when I graduated. The school had been accredited by ATS since 1958, and that allowed me to continue my education without any problems. A quality education, not accreditation was the primary factor in my choosing to come to Southeastern as a student." SACS accredited Southeastern in 1978.

Concerning probation, Robinson said, "It means you work to get everything back in order, but in the meantime you continue on with education."

Lyric Wohlgeomuth, a master of divinity student, from Sanford, Florida said, "I think this is necessary because all the points SACS identified have not been accomplished yet. I don't think probation is a big deal. God brought me here, and I'm not leaving because the school is on probation. God didn't tell me to come here and stay until the school was put on probation, and then leave."

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