

Accrediting body extends sanctions for Southwestern

June 30, 2025

FORT WORTH (BP)—Southwestern Seminary President David S. Dockery announced June 27 the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges](#) extended sanctions against Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary first implemented in 2023.

Dockery noted the regional accrediting body acknowledged “significant recent accomplishments in addressing noncompliance” and that institutional evidence “makes it reasonable for the Board to assume it will remedy all deficiencies within a 12-month period.”

In an eight-page letter to the Southwestern community, Dockery noted the institution’s “long-term pattern of challenges, financial and otherwise” and pledged to continue to work with the agency to address its concerns.

He also pledged to Southwestern’s “constituents and publics” that the institution “will work faithfully and responsibly concerning expectations from accreditors.”

Dockery commended the work of the board of trustees, faculty, staff, students and others “who have worked so hard, sacrificed, served, prayed, given, supported, counseled and encouraged” the administration for the past 33 months.

“The decision from SACSCOC, which cannot be appealed, does not in any way take away from the remarkable strides that have been made by the entire Southwestern community since the fall of 2022,” he said, adding it is “vital to recognize” all academic programs “remain fully accredited.”

Dockery said the association's "decision must not be seen as a setback but only as further motivation to continue the institutional resolve and good progress that has been made to this point."

Continued optimism

In a separate statement, Bob Brown, chairman of the seminary's board of trustees, said while he is disappointed in the decision, he is "extremely optimistic about Southwestern's future."

"With our enrollment continuing to rise and our financial position measurably stronger, there are sound reasons to be positive about the future of SWBTS," said Brown, executive director of Lakeway Christian Schools in White Pine, Tenn.

"However, my optimism is primarily driven by the work of the Holy Spirit on Seminary Hill with hope and unity sweeping the campus in tangibly observable ways every day."

Expressing appreciation for Dockery and the rest of the seminary leadership, Brown also pledged the "full cooperation" of the board of trustees with the regional accrediting agency "to take the actions necessary to bring the seminary in full compliance with its accreditation standards and policies."

In its disclosure statement posted on the organization's website on June 27, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reported the seminary's accreditation has been continued for "Good Cause" and placed on "Probation" for 12 months following its review, citing Core Requirement 13.1 (Financial resources) and Standard 13.3 (Financial responsibility).

These two standards have been at the core of the concerns from the agency since the conclusion of the 2021-22 fiscal year when the institution

completed the year with an operational deficit of \$8,911,823 and a decrease in net assets of \$15,317,497.

“These standards expect the institution to have sound financial resources and a demonstrated, stable financial base to support the mission of the institution and to manage its financial resources and operate in a fiscally responsible manner,” the notice said.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges noted after two years of monitoring: “Instead of removing the institution’s accreditation, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees can act to extend the accreditation for Good Cause if (1) the institution has demonstrated significant recent accomplishments in addressing non-compliance, and (2) the institution has provided evidence which makes it reasonable for the Board to assume it will remedy all deficiencies within a 12-month period, and (3) the institution has provided assurance to the Board that it is not aware of any other reasons, other than those identified by the Board, why the institution cannot be continued for Good Cause.

“Probation for Good Cause is the most serious public sanction imposed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees short of loss of accreditation.”

Dockery expressed gratitude for the commendations offered by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

While acknowledging Southwestern is not in compliance with the agency’s standards, Dockery noted the seminary’s financial position in the spring of 2025 “was measurably stronger” than it was in the spring of 2021 when its accreditation was reaffirmed.

Committed to continued improvements

“Southwestern has reached a place of financial stability, but we need to establish what SACSCOC refers to as ‘a pattern of financial stability.’ Our

efforts are now focused on ongoing sustainability as well as additional improvement,” he said.

“We respect the SACSCOC process and promise to work with them regarding next steps,” Dockery said. He invited the seminary community “to join with me in asking the Lord for his ongoing help as we recommit ourselves to the good work that has been started.”

Dockery also said he welcomed the seminary’s regional accreditor for its April 2026 site visit to evaluate the institution’s progress. The seminary remains in good standing with its national accreditor, Association of Theological Schools.

Dockery’s letter cited many enrollment and financial metrics that demonstrate dramatic improvements in the financial picture of the seminary since the initial warning status was put in place by SACSCOC in 2023 and before.

Among the metrics cited by Dockery are:

- increases in enrollment headcount, annual credit hours taught, and fulltime equivalent enrollment;
- “positive” budget trends in the current budget year, which ends July 31, compared to the prior budget year, and a “positive change” of \$8 million in the operational budget in the past two years;
- significant increases in tuition and operating revenues, decreases in operating expenses, and reduction in number of full-time employees;
- reduction in long-term debt and the complete elimination of short-term debt;
- decreased liabilities and increased assets; and
- change in cash position from a loss of nearly \$5 million in 2022 to a gain of more than \$9 million in 2024, and an increase in cash and

cash equivalents from \$1.7 million to more than \$12 million.

“Overall, these numbers have resulted in a significant change in Southwestern’s overall financial picture,” he said, noting the seminary’s bankers “have applauded the commendable progress” of the institution since the fall of 2022.

“We pledge to the Southwestern constituents and publics that Southwestern will work faithfully and responsibly concerning expectations from accreditors,” Dockery said.

“I invite Southwesterners to join me with a new resolve for the sake of Southwesterners who have gone before us, for our shared love for our current students, and for our shared hopefulness regarding future students.

“Together, we will work to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness in all things, trusting in our providential God and acknowledging our full and complete dependence on him for his provision and protection for Southwestern in the days to come.”

Dockery’s letter to the Southwestern community is available [here](#), as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document [here](#).