

Louisiana College placed on probation: School must comply with accrediting agency standards

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The major accrediting agency for schools in the South has placed a Louisiana Baptist college on probation for a year for violating the agency's standards, partly for what it called the undue influence of a Southern Baptist movement on behalf of biblical inerrancy.

Louisiana College, located in Pineville, has been roiled by controversy for several years, with much of it coming to a head in the past two years as a group of fundamentalists gained a majority on the institution's board of directors. All board members are appointed by the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

In recent months, the college's president, chief academic administrator and board chairman have resigned. In November—only a week after being introduced to the Louisiana Baptist Convention—the college's newly called president unexpectedly withdrew his application for the job, citing "governance issues."

The college was placed on probation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools at their early December meeting in Atlanta. Probation from the SACS is a more serious sanction than a warning or "notation" on the school's record, but less severe than full removal of accreditation. The school will have 12 months to prove that it is in compliance with the agency's standards.

Earlier last year a special committee from the accrediting agency visited the college's campus on a fact-finding mission. Committee members determined that Louisiana College was not in compliance with several of the association's standards regarding academic freedom and board governance.

"The committee concluded, based upon extensive interviews with members of the board of trustees, senior staff and faculty, that a significant portion of the board of

trustees of Louisiana College are influenced if not controlled by the agenda of the Louisiana Inerrancy Fellowship and the Louisiana Baptist Convention," the SACS report read.

The study team said an agenda from the inerrancy group—established as a political movement within the Louisiana Baptist Convention— had unduly influenced the board's work.

Among the controversies on campus were two trustee-initiated policies that many professors said violated academic freedom—a 2003 move to require prior approval of class texts and materials by administrators and more recent actions that made the board more closely involved in faculty hiring and that required new faculty hires to be in agreement with the Southern Baptist Convention's 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.

According to a statement released by interim President John Traylor, the school will meet the accreditation goal. "It is my opinion that SACS is calling on the institution to recognize the seriousness of the accrediting standards. Trustees, administration and faculty must take the steps necessary to move the college into full compliance, lest we lose membership in SACS."

It continued: "The entire college community—trustees, administration, faculty—have committed themselves to the actions necessary to bring Louisiana College into compliance with the standards of accreditation." *-Associated Baptist Press*