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EDUCATION GUIDE

Education

Triad college leaders divided on pros, cons of new accrediting body



Students walk on campus at N.C. A&T State University.

COURTESY OF N.C. A&T



By [Anna Blumenthal](#) – Reporter, Triad Business Journal

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Story Highlights

- Six public university systems launched the Commission for Public Higher Education.
- Opinions are mixed among local university leaders on alternative accrediting body.
- CPHE has faced criticism over concerns it could politicize higher ed, lacks transparency.

When the UNC System announced last summer that it would help launch a brand-new accrediting body, it upended a decades-old system most colleges rarely question.

The Commission for Public Higher Education, a newly formed consortium of six public university systems – North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Georgia, South

Carolina and Tennessee – is pursuing a first-of-its-kind accreditation model designed by and for public institutions.

Accreditors evaluate academic quality, and schools can't receive federal financial aid without their signoff.

CPHE aims to provide an alternative to traditional regional accreditors by reducing administrative burden while still meeting U.S. Department of Education requirements, with plans to seek federal recognition between late 2027 and mid-2028. As of now, it is optional for schools to opt into CPHE.

Though the effort remains in its early stages, its emergence is already prompting leaders of Triad institutions to reflect on what accreditation means in today's fast-changing world and how higher education can move more quickly and responsively to meet student needs.

“I do think it's time to look at a fresh change to accreditation and realize we're going to have to move faster and be more responsive to the needs of people, and hopefully we will be in a better place,” says N.C. A&T Chancellor James Martin II. “But it's too early to know what the impacts are.”



James R. Martin II, N.C. A&T Chancellor

CHRIS ENGLISH

Meeting student and employer needs

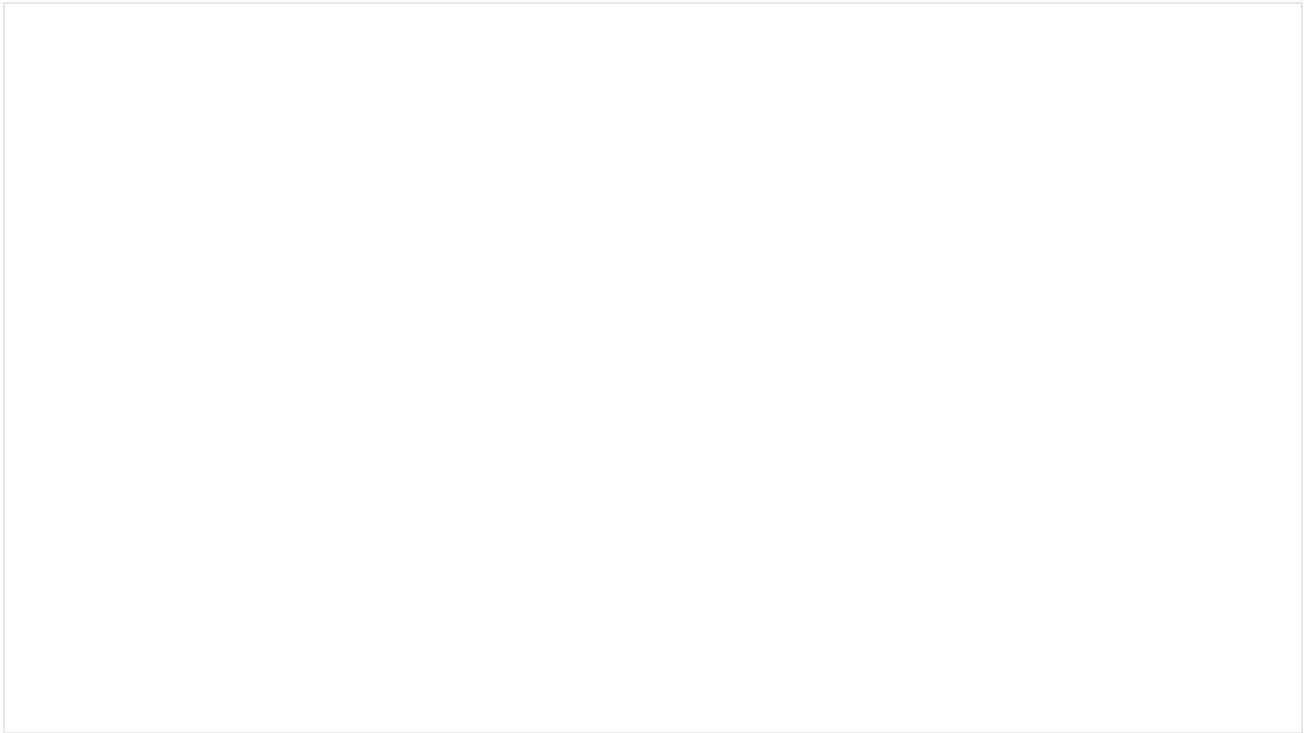
Because reaccreditation cycles span years, Martin says it may be years before he knows how CPHE will affect A&T.

He notes that accreditation agencies largely drive universities' thinking and investments, so any shift could have significant effects. In a more interconnected, technology-driven world, he views potential changes as positive if they allow institutions to respond more quickly.

"I've always thought, 'are the traditional accreditation agencies changing as fast as the demands in the public?'" Martin says.

He says that with one of the most common and persistent criticisms of higher education being that it is too slow to change, that accreditation could be a driver of that perception.

Martin says that ultimately, employers will decide how relevant accreditation is today and how valuable different accrediting bodies are. However, he is optimistic for what the future could bring.



Students walk on campus at N.C. A&T State University.

COURTESY OF N.C. A&T

Accounting for differences

While Martin welcomes change, Winston-Salem State University Chancellor Bonita Brown is a bit more cautious about its potential impact.

She says that participation in CPHE is optional and she is instead focused on WSSU's fifth-year review for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

The list of schools that have signed letters of intent seeking CPHE accreditation so far includes:

- Appalachian State University (N.C.)
- Chipola College (Fla.)
- Columbus State University (Ga.)
- Florida Atlantic University
- Florida Polytechnic University
- Georgia Southern University
- N.C. Central University
- Texas A&M Kingsville
- Texas A&M Texarkana
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte

She says it will be important to watch the initial cohort because there have not been new accrediting bodies in a long time. Her main hope is that CPHE considers the differences that each university possesses.

At WSSU, about 70% of students receive an income-based federal Pell Grant. She says that additionally, WSSU is not staffed like a flagship university, so creating an additional team to focus on CPHE accreditation would be difficult.

She hopes the standards in the new accreditation would acknowledge that schools have different funding levels, types of students, alumni bases, facilities, funding and resources.

“I think what I would like for people to think about as they're creating an accreditor, is that all schools are not created equal, and so one set of standards and trying to fit every school in one standard will be problematic,” Brown says. “I think it has to be flexible and nimble and evaluate and assess and credit the uniqueness of the university.”



WSSU Chancellor Bonita Brown shakes hands with a student at commencement.

COURTESY OF WSSU

Determining credibility

While many questions remain, Brown is watching how new accreditors reshape the landscape.

“It's given the whole landscape of accreditation a marketplace that it didn't have before. So, what is that going to mean for SACCS?” Brown says. “What is that going to mean for the other accrediting bodies, as we all watch this new one stand up?”

CPHE has faced criticism over concerns it could politicize higher education and lacks transparency, with some arguing it risks self-policing. Brown says market forces will ultimately determine its credibility.

“I don't think that's going to stand because I do think the other market pressures will not allow it,” Brown says. “If it turns into that people feel like it's too soft, you better believe that other accrediting agencies will point that out.”

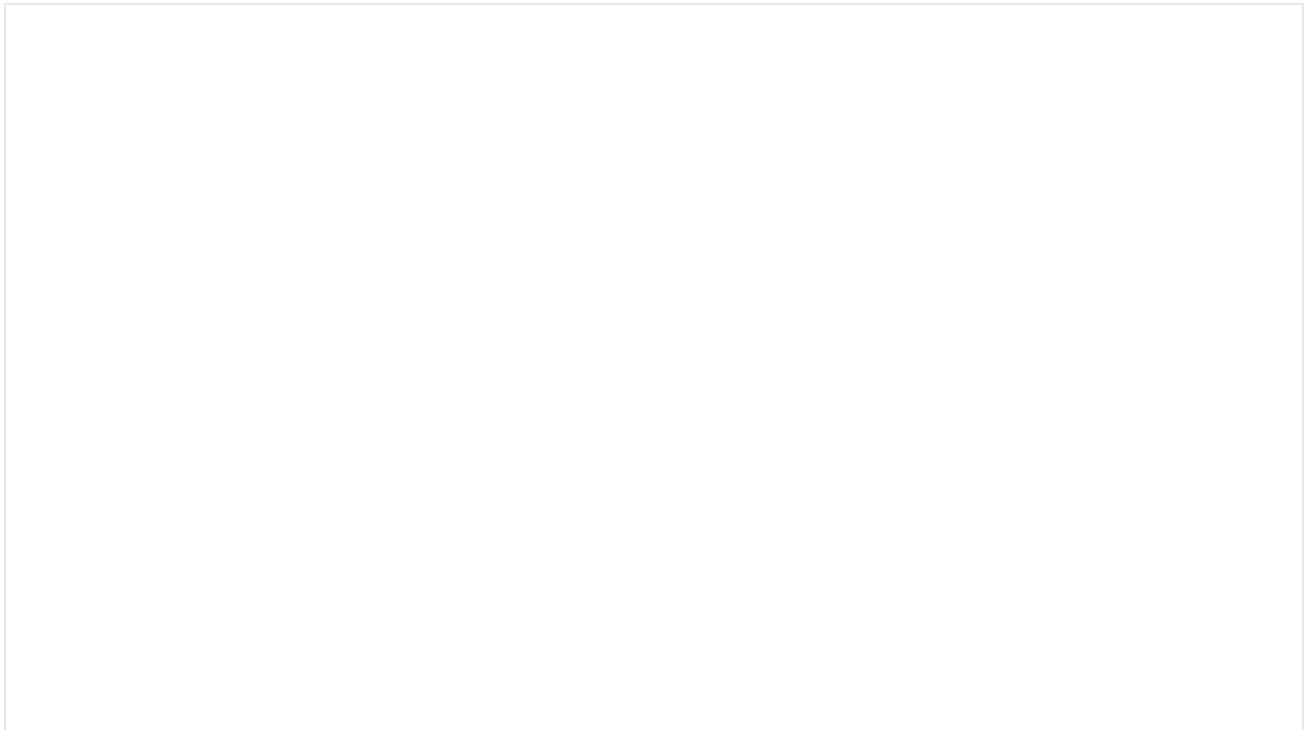
Brown says accreditation changes are unlikely to influence how students and families choose colleges.

“I think people, to be honest, don't think about accreditation until a school loses it,” Brown says.

Accreditation in flux

Guilford College recently navigated its own accreditation challenges. In December 2024, SACSCOC had continued its probation for good cause for the second consecutive year for concerns about its fiscal responsibility and feasibility.

After a difficult two-year journey, President Jean Bordewich in December 2025 announced that the college retained its accreditation, allowing the university to continue operations normally.



Guilford College president Jean Bordewich delivers remarks about the school's accreditation status.

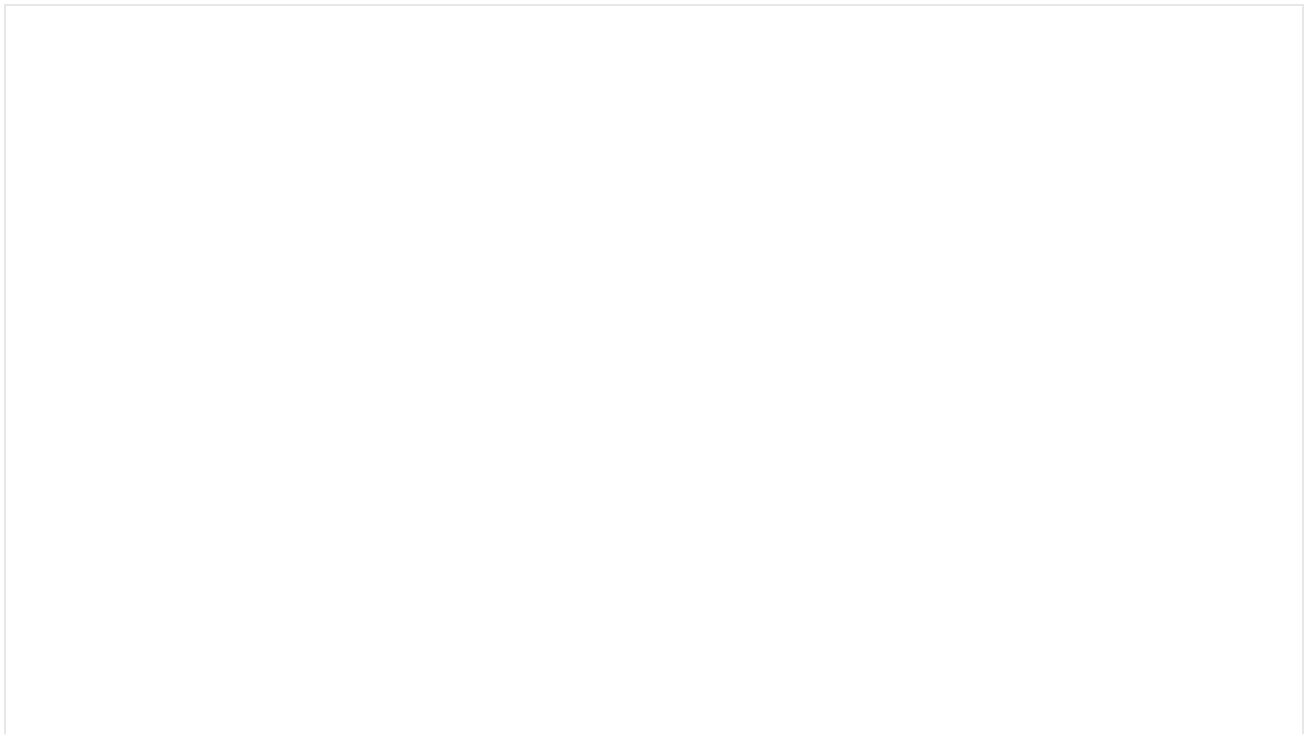
CARL WILSON

Bordewich says that the school's main priority as it comes to accreditation right now is focusing on its 10-year reaffirmation from SACSCOC that is set for 2028.

She says that in addition to new accrediting bodies, there are also changes happening in the traditional ones. For example, in August 2025, SACSCOC appointed Stephen Pruitt as its new president, succeeding the retiring Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, who led the organization for 20 years.

She will be watching how leadership changes at SACSCOC impact accreditation as well as how new accrediting bodies take shape.

"It's interesting, because [accreditation] is very much in flux, after having been pretty well established for a century," Bordewich says.



Guilford College displays the slogan "uniquely Guilford" across its campus as part of a new admissions campaign.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL CROUCH

As CPHE is focused on public universities, she does not think it will impact Guilford much but would consider new accreditors if it were to become an option.

Bordewich echoes Brown's remarks that she does not think different accrediting bodies will impact how families choose universities.

"If we're both accredited, but by different bodies, I think it's in the weeds for most people," Bordewich says. "Is there any difference? I'm not sure."