

State of Tennessee



The Secretary of State
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0305

Tre Hargett
Secretary of State

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March 26, 2026

Dr. Stephen L. Pruitt
President
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, GA 30033

Dear Dr. Pruitt,

Thank you for the thoughtful and proactive guidance you and your Board of Trustees offered this month on reduced-credit undergraduate degree programs. This is a subject I, as a member of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, have advocated for some time now. Your guidance is timely as our institutions have been actively considering how such programs might serve students in Tennessee most effectively. I appreciate SACSCOC for embracing this innovative approach that can help meet the needs of students and employers.

In establishing this new path, I would like to emphasize the importance of how these programs are named to articulate their value and appeal to prospective students and employers. As you note in your third FAQ, these degrees are an option "where the academic goal of a program can be achieved through a more *focused* (my emphasis) curriculum." I believe this language captures the value of the innovation, and request that you add to your list of approved names, "Focused Bachelor of (Discipline)."

It is an alternative to the "Reduced-Hour" or "Abridged" bachelor's degree names already approved that does not suggest it would be deficient or lacking. A "Focused Bachelor's" option signals that the student's coursework was focused on a rigorous curriculum within their discipline while still distinguishing the degree from a traditional bachelor's degree.

There are other items that will merit further consideration, such as the required disclaimer, but they can be revisited as progress is made in establishing this new degree. For now, I will limit my comments to these. The blanket requirement feels premature and could dissuade students from focused programs. Graduate/professional programs have largely not considered how their admission requirements might adapt in response. It seems a tacit way of leading them to reject focused coursework. Nor am I aware of a broad employer survey on this topic. While the level of acceptance may vary by field, it is reasonable to anticipate that many employers and graduate programs would welcome students with such degrees.

Again, thank you for your leadership in establishing these guidelines and this policy statement. We are moving in the right direction, and I am grateful to you for having done so.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tre Hargett", written over a blue circular stamp.

Tre Hargett
Secretary of State

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