




TO: Higher Education Committee
FROM: John L. D'Agati 
SUBJECT: Renewal of Institutional Accreditation: Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary

DATE: June 1, 2017

AUTHORIZATION(S): 

SUMMARY

Issue for Decision

Should the Board of Regents renew the institutional accreditation of Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary?

Reason(s) for Consideration

Required by State regulation.

Proposed Handling

This question will come before the Higher Education Committee at its June 2017 meeting, where it will be voted on and action taken. It will then come before the full Board at its June 2017 meeting for final action.

Members of the Board of Regents with a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest on this application are asked to recuse themselves from participating in the deliberation and decision.

Procedural History

On April 7, 2017, the Regents Advisory Council on Institutional Accreditation (RAC) met to consider the accreditation renewal application of Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary (the Seminary). RAC's recommendation is hereby transmitted to the Board of Regents for consideration and final action. The RAC's recommendation was to renew the accreditation of Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary with conditions for three years, during which time the institution shall come into compliance with standards for accreditation

within two years, with submission of documents and materials as required by the State Education Department.

Consistent with Section 4-1.5(a)(8)(v) of the Regents Rules, the Commissioner adopted the RAC's findings and recommendations and hereby transmits them to the Board of Regents for consideration and final action. In furtherance of the RAC recommendation, the Department will be requiring the Seminary to submit documents and materials that address all remaining areas of non-compliance, including but not limited to, material specifically related to formalizing and implementing assessment mechanisms and regular financial updates. The full record of the application for renewal of accreditation is available to the Board, electronically and in hard copy, through the Board Secretary.

Background Information

Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary (Jordanville, Herkimer County) has applied for renewal of its institutional accreditation by the New York State Board of Regents and Commissioner of Education.

The Seminary is a Regents–chartered independent institution offering students a single program of study in Theology leading to a Bachelor's degree. Three certificate programs are also offered. The Seminary received a provisional charter in 1948 and was granted an absolute charter in 1962. Its last accreditation visit was in 2007, at which time the Seminary was accredited for a period of ten years. The period of accreditation was administratively extended to September 30, 2017 pending completion of the process for renewal.

Related Regents Items

None.

Recommendation

VOTED: That the Board of Regents renew the accreditation of Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary with conditions for three years, during which time the institution shall come into compliance with standards for accreditation within two years, with submission of documents and materials as required by the State Education Department.

Information in Support of Recommendation

Peer Review Visit

On September 28 and 29, 2016, a peer review team (“Team”) conducted a site visit to the Seminary as part of a review to determine the institution’s compliance with Regents accreditation standards. In its report, the Team made a total of 11 recommendations.

The Team found the Seminary in compliance with standards (as defined under Section 4-1.4 of the Regents Rules) addressing institutional mission; support services; admissions; student complaints; and requirements addressing Title IV, teach out, and public disclosure responsibilities.

The Team found the Seminary to be out of compliance with the following standards: assessment of student achievement; programs of study; faculty; resources; administration; and consumer information.

Overall, the Team concluded that the institution had the understanding to adequately address the recommendations.

The Department transmitted the draft team report to the Seminary for review and comment. The Seminary accepted the draft report’s recommendations, provided clarification of existing Seminary activities in relation to the standards, and described actions and plans to address the recommendations. The resulting compliance review report includes the draft Team report, the Seminary’s response, and the Department’s recommendation with respect to accreditation action.

Based on the self-study and other pertinent material, the Team’s report and the Seminary’s response, the Department found that the institution had achieved compliance with the standards for administration and consumer information. The other areas of non-compliance remain, and are of a nature or scope that may affect the institution’s ability to achieve and maintain adherence to the institutional accreditation standards. However, the institution demonstrated its ability to rectify identified deficiencies and to strengthen practice by successfully correcting two non-compliant standards in its initial response. As a result, the Department recommended accreditation with conditions for a period of three years, during which time the institution would come into compliance with standards of accreditation by the end of year two, with the Department monitoring progress through an addendum to the Annual Data Report and a possible site visit during the two-year period.

Regents Advisory Council on Institutional Accreditation (RAC) Review

As required by Subpart 4-1 of the Regents Rules, the Department transmitted the compliance review report and Seminary’s self-study for consideration by the Regents Advisory Council. (The RAC is established in §3.12(d) of the Rules of the Board of Regents “to review applications for accreditation and renewal of accreditation pursuant to Part 4 of this Title, and such other matters as the Department may ask it to review, and make recommendations to the Regents and the Commissioner based on its review.”)

On April 7, 2017, the RAC met to consider the Seminary's application. In a public meeting, it met with representatives of the Seminary, a member of the peer review team, and Department staff. The RAC members discussed their observations and asked questions of the institution. The institution's representatives responded to each of these questions. The RAC then voted unanimously to recommend renewal of institutional accreditation with conditions, as follows:

Renew the accreditation of Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary with conditions for a period of three years, during which the institution shall come into compliance with standards for accreditation within two years, with submission of documents and materials as required by the State Education Department.

Commissioner's Review

Neither the Seminary nor the Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education appealed the RAC's recommendation. Therefore, pursuant to Subpart 4-1 of the Regents Rules, the Commissioner adopted the Council's recommendation as her recommendation to the Board of Regents.

The attachment to this item sets forth the range of accreditation actions authorized under Subpart 4-1 of the Rules of the Board of Regents.

Rules of the Board of Regents

Subpart 4-1, Voluntary Institutional Accreditation for Title IV Purposes

§4-1.2 Definitions.

As used in the Subpart:

(a) *Accreditation* means the status of public recognition that the Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents grant to an educational institution that meets the standards and requirements prescribed in this Subpart.

(b) *Accreditation action* means accreditation, accreditation with conditions, probationary accreditation, approval of substantive changes in the scope of accreditation, and denial, revocation, or termination of accreditation.

(c) *Accreditation with conditions* means accreditation that requires the institution to take steps to remedy issues raised in a review for accreditation, and provide reports and/or submit to site visits concerning such issues, provided that such issues do not materially affect the institution's substantial compliance with the standards and requirements for accreditation.

(d) *Adverse action or adverse accreditation action* means suspension, withdrawal, denial, revocation, or termination of accreditation or pre-accreditation.

....

(s) *Probationary accreditation* means accreditation for a period of time, not to exceed two years, during which the institution shall come into compliance with standards for accreditation through corrective action.

From NYSED's Handbook of Institutional Accreditation (p.5)

At a regularly scheduled public meeting, the Board of Regents considers the complete record of the accreditation process (including the institution's self-study, compliance review report, and the record of the RAC) and makes the final determination on accreditation action. Representatives of the applicant institution may be present at this meeting; however, they do not participate in discussion of their application. The Regents may act or may defer action pending further consideration by the Council or the receipt of additional information. If the Regents take adverse action as defined in Regents Rules §4-1.2(d) on an application for institutional accreditation or renewal of accreditation, a statement of the reason(s) for this action will be provided to the applicant institution.

Possible Accreditation Actions

- ***Accreditation without conditions.*** The institution is in full compliance with the standards for institutional accreditation. Any follow-up matters are not, in the judgment of the Regents, of a nature or scope that affects the institution's capacity to maintain adherence to the institutional accreditation standards for the period of

accreditation. Recommendations or any follow-up reports relate either to minor compliance matters or to the strengthening of practices that meet the standards of compliance. Accreditation without conditions may be for a period of up to ten years. Accreditation without conditions may apply to institutions seeking initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.

- ***Accreditation with conditions.*** The institution is in substantial compliance with the standards for institutional accreditation. Any areas of non-compliance are not of such nature or scope as to call into question the institution's substantive adherence to the institutional accreditation standards during the term of accreditation. The institution has demonstrated the intent and capacity to rectify identified deficiencies and to strengthen practice in marginally acceptable matters within no more than two years. The institution will be required to take steps to remedy issues raised in the review for accreditation and to provide reports and/or submit to site visits concerning such issues. Accreditation with conditions may be for a period of up to ten years, contingent on a finding of compliance within no more than two years on any areas or deficiency cited in the Regents accreditation action. Accreditation with conditions may apply to institutions seeking initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.
- ***Probationary accreditation.*** Probationary accreditation means accreditation for a set period of time, not to exceed two years, during which the institution shall come into compliance with standards for accreditation through corrective action. During this period, the institution provides documentation of compliance with standards, particularly all standards that were not met at the time of the Regents action. A follow-up visit by Department staff and/or peer reviewers may be required following provision of a required report. Probationary accreditation is only available to institutions seeking renewal of accreditation.
- ***Denial of accreditation.*** The institution does not meet standards for institutional accreditation and cannot reasonably be expected to meet those standards within two years. Denial of accreditation may apply to institutions seeking initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.