

Checklist for Higher Education

The following section contains a checklist addressing issues of particular relevance to higher education. The guidance is considered best practice for higher education. The issue will continue to be monitored by NACUBO and the Accounting Principles Council and additional guidance may be provided if appropriate.

Section	Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002	NACUBO Recommendations
Title I	Public Company Accounting Oversight Board	
101 - 109	Describes public company accounting oversight board duties.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title II	Auditor Independence	
201	<p>Public accounting firms are prohibited from performing these nonaudit services to financial statement audit clients:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Bookkeeping or other services related to the accounting records or financial statements; (2) Financial system design and implementation; (3) Appraisal or valuation services, fairness opinions, or contribution-in-kind reports; (4) Actuarial services; (5) Internal auditing outsourcing services; (6) Management or human resource functions; (7) Broker or dealer, investment adviser, or investment banking services; (8) Legal services and expert services unrelated to the audit; (9) Any other service the Accounting Oversight Board determines, by regulation, is impermissible. <p>A registered public accounting firm may engage in any other service, including tax services for an audit client, but <i>only if the Audit Committee approves the activity in advance.</i></p>	Institutions should prohibit their independent auditors from providing the nonaudit services prohibited by the Act unless extenuating circumstances exist and the audit committee approves the work in advance.
202	The audit committee must pre-approve all services provided by the auditor.	Institutions should require pre-approval by the audit committee for all prohibited, nonaudit services performed by the independent auditor.
203	The lead (or coordinating) audit partner and the reviewing audit partner of the public accounting firm must rotate off the audit every five years.	Institutions should require a rotation of the lead partner every seven years with a timeout of two years.
204	<p>The public accounting firm must report to the audit committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) All critical accounting policies and practices used by the client that have been discussed with management; (2) All alternative treatments of financial information, ramifications of such use, and the treatment preferred by the public accounting firm; (3) Other material written communication between the public accounting firm and management, such as the management letter or schedule of unadjusted differences. 	<p>Audit committee oversight is critical to ensure the independence of the audit decisions.</p> <p>The audit engagement letter should be addressed to the audit committee rather than internal management.</p>
205	Conforming amendments to the SEC Act of 1934.	<i>Not applicable</i>

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206	The public accounting firm cannot have employed the CEO, controller, CFO, chief accounting officer, or any person in an equivalent position, during the one-year period preceding the audit.	Institutions should carefully consider the benefits of employing a CFO or controller who has worked for the auditing firm within the last year and consider how the position may relate to the institution's external audit. To forego the one-year waiting period, institutions should document the benefits and risks and seek board approval.
207	The GAO will do a study on the potential effects of mandatory rotation of public accounting firms.	The current emphasis is on rotation of audit partners (section 203) rather than rotation of firms. The audit committee should annually evaluate the performance of the external auditor. In addition, the committee should consider periodically re-competing the selection of the external audit firm.
208 - 209	SEC final authority for Section 10A and considerations by appropriate State regulatory authorities.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title III	Corporate Responsibility	
301	<p>(1) The Commission may prohibit the listing of securities of any firm found not to be in compliance with paragraphs 2 - 6 of this section.</p> <p>(2) The audit committee shall be directly responsible for the appointment, compensation, and oversight of the work of any registered public accounting firm employed by its company and the public accounting firm shall report directly to the audit committee.</p> <p>(3) Each member of the audit committee shall be a member of the Board of Directors and shall otherwise be independent. Independent is defined as not receiving, other than for service on the Board of Directors, any consulting, advisory, or other compensatory fee from the company, and not being an affiliated person of the company.</p> <p>(4) The audit committee shall establish procedures for:</p> <p>(a) The receipt, retention, and treatment of complaints received by the company regarding accounting, internal controls and auditing matters.</p> <p>(b) The confidential, anonymous submission by employees of questionable accounting or auditing matters.</p> <p>(5) The Audit Committee shall have the authority to engage independent counsel or other advisors, as necessary to carry out its duties.</p> <p>(6) Each company shall provide appropriate funding as determined by the Audit Committee for payment to the public accounting firm and any advisors employed by the Audit Committee under paragraph 5 above.</p>	<p>Institutions that do not have an audit committee should assign the audit function to another committee of the board of trustees, for example, the finance committee, or to the board as a whole. Institutions that assign audit committee functions to another committee should add "audit" to the committee title, for example, "Finance and Audit" committee.</p> <p>(1) Not applicable</p> <p>(2) Audit committee involvement is critical in the selection of auditors and the performance of the audit.</p> <p>(3) Independence of audit committee members is important. Management representatives should not be voting members of the committee.</p> <p>(4) A good practice would be the establishment of confidential complaint mechanisms for employees; for example, a hot line, anonymous e-mail/voicemail, secure complaint boxes, or extending existing employee grievance processes or communication channels to the institution's internal auditors. The audit committee should review the nature and disposition of reported matters.</p> <p>(5) The audit committee should have all necessary authority contained in its charter.</p> <p>(6) The charter should also specify that appropriate funding be available for the audit committee.</p>
302	<p>The CEO and CFO shall certify along with the annual audit report that:</p> <p>(1) They have reviewed the report;</p> <p>(2) Based on their knowledge, the report does not contain any untrue statement of a material fact or omission of a material fact that makes the statements misleading;</p> <p>(3) Based on their knowledge, the financial statements</p>	<p>The provisions of the Act extend the current audit representation letter responsibilities. If institutions publicly disclose financial statements, they should consider these assertions. However, be warned that assertion 4 includes new and complex affirmations on the adequacy of internal controls over both financial reporting and financial disclosures.</p> <p>The degree of decentralization of financial operations is an important consideration for higher education. Business units'</p>

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	<p>present in all material respects the financial condition and results of operations;</p> <p>(4) They are responsible for establishing and maintaining internal controls, ensuring that material information relating to the company and its consolidated subsidiaries is made known to officers and others within those entities; have evaluated the effectiveness of internal controls within 90 days prior to the report; and have presented their conclusions about the effectiveness of their internal controls based on their evaluation as of that date;</p> <p>(5) They have disclosed to the auditors and the audit committee all significant deficiencies and material weaknesses in the internal controls that could adversely affect the company's ability to record, process, summarize, and report financial data;</p> <p>(6) They have indicated in the report whether or not there were significant changes in internal controls or in other factors that could significantly affect internal controls subsequent to the date of their evaluation, including any corrective actions.</p> <p>Reincorporating outside of the United States does not lessen the requirements of Section 302.</p>	<p>responsibility for financial reporting should be clearly defined, including policies for those activities. Institutions that are decentralized should consider implementing “sub-certification” requirements from financial leaders responsible for the financial results of units, departments, or schools. The sub-certification provides assurance on the underlying numbers and controls.</p> <p>Institutions should start documenting their financial reporting process; and identifying and evaluating the adequacy of controls over financial reporting and other financial disclosures.</p> <p>The audit committee should consider periodic inquiries of financial executives on the adequacy of controls.</p>
303	It is unlawful for any officer or director of a company to take an action to fraudulently influence, coerce, manipulate, or mislead an auditor engaged in the performance of an audit for the purpose of rendering the financial statements materially misleading.	This should be addressed in the institution’s code of conduct/code of ethics.
304	If an accounting restatement is necessary due to misconduct, the CEO and CFO shall reimburse the company for any bonus or other incentive or equity-based compensation received by that person during the 12-month period following the issuance of the financial statements, as well as reimburse the company for any profits realized from the sale of securities of the company during that same 12-month period.	<i>Not applicable.</i> However, the audit committee may want to review compensation arrangements for the CEO and CFO. Incentives related to financial results should be disclosed to the audit committee.
305	The SEC may issue an order to prohibit, conditionally or unconditionally, permanently or temporarily, any person who has violated section 10(b) of the 1934 Act from acting as an officer or director of a company if the SEC has found that such person is unfit.	<i>Not applicable.</i> However, institutions should consider any SEC action in connection with hiring officers and nominating trustees; and ensure that employment contracts of senior officers allow removal for financial impropriety.
306 - 308	Concerns sales of stock, fair funds for investors and attorneys practicing before the SEC.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title IV	Enhanced Financial Disclosures	
401	SEC shall study off-balance sheet disclosures to determine their extent and whether GAAP results reflect the economics of such transactions.	Higher education should follow current and appropriate accounting standard guidance (i.e. FASB, GASB).
402	In general, it shall be unlawful for a company to extend personal loans to any director or executive officer.	The audit committee should be aware of and review policies on personal loans and understand that housing assistance included as part of compensation is not a personal loan.
403	Directors, officers, and 10%+ owners must report designated equity security transactions by the end of the second business day following the day the transaction	The audit committee should be aware of and review policies on ownership interests in related ventures or start-ups. Existing conflict of interest policies can be leveraged and

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	was executed.	should be reviewed with the audit committee.
404	<p>Each annual report shall contain an internal control report, which:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) States the responsibility of management for establishing and maintaining an adequate internal control structure and procedures for financial reporting; and (2) Contains an assessment, as of the end of the fiscal year, of the effectiveness of the internal control structure and procedures of the company for financial reporting. <p>The public accounting firm shall attest to and report on the internal control assessment made by management.</p>	<p>Identifying, designing, and maintaining controls and procedures that safeguard assets and minimize risk is sound business practice. A good business practice would be to start planning how an internal control assessment might be conducted. A few institutions have started doing risk assessments and documenting key financial processes. The audit committee should consider independence issues if contemplating using the external auditor for this review function. For reference, institutions can obtain a copy of the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations (COSO) model of an internal control framework. The COSO model is considered the most widely accepted model for controls.</p> <p>Institutions with internal audit departments should consider using them to periodically report on internal controls to the audit committee in addition to reporting to management. These activities should be coordinated with the risk assessment and internal control initiatives described above.</p> <p>The results of the internal control assessment should be tested to ensure compliance. A positive assertion on controls would require a large sustained effort and would require the external auditor to perform an attestation on internal controls, which would be expensive and time consuming. NACUBO does not recommend external auditor attestation or audit of internal controls. An alternative would be for management to provide the assertions and testing without the external audit attestation.</p> <p>NACUBO encourages institutions to take this topic seriously and start planning how an internal control assessment might be conducted. NACUBO will monitor the actions of institutions and communicate discoveries. At this point NACUBO and the APC are not aware of any institutions that have committed to this positive assertion on controls.</p>
405	Sections 401, 402, and 404 do not apply to any investment company registered under section 8 of the Investment Company Act of 1940.	<i>Not applicable</i>
406	Requires each company to disclose whether it has adopted a code of ethics for its senior financial officers and the contents of the code of ethics.	A best practice is the adoption of a code of ethics for senior financial officers. Subsequently, the audit committee should review the adequacy of the code and periodically review how compliance is assured.
407	<p>Companies are required to disclose whether at least one member of the audit committee is a "financial expert."</p> <p>The final rule also provides a definition of a financial expert. In the final rule, recognition was given that an audit committee financial expert can acquire the requisite attributes of an expert in many different ways and that experience, in addition to education, is an important consideration.</p>	<p>A best practice would be the inclusion of at least one financial expert on the audit committee. Institutions should consider the following in defining financial expertise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarity with estimates, accruals, and reserves relevant to higher education • longevity and experience with a given institution can be considered "other relevant experience" <p>Colleges and universities should also consider rotating the financial expert and begin planning for the process and cost of</p>

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		recruiting, training, and retaining financial expertise. The recruitment and retention of a financial expert by public institutions might be limited when alumni or elected officials appoint the board.
408 - 409	Addresses enhanced and real time disclosure by issuers of securities.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title V	Analyst Conflicts of Interest	
501	Treatment of security analysts by registered securities associations and national security exchanges.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title VI	Commission Resources and Authority	
601 - 604	Appearance and practice before the SEC, funding, federal court authority and qualifications of brokers and dealers.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title VII	Studies and Reports	
701 - 705	Concerns studies regarding accounting firms, credit rating agencies, violators, violations, investment banks, financial advisors, and enforcement of securities laws.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title VIII	Corporate and Criminal Fraud Accountability	
801 - 807	Discusses securities fraud, penalties, statute of limitations, sentencing, and employee protection.	<i>Not applicable</i> , however regarding section 802, a good practice would be to ensure that documents and records sent or received in connection with the audit are retained for seven years.
Title IX	White Collar Crime Penalty Enhancements	
901 - 906	This section advances criminal penalties for fraudulent acts and the US Department of Justice jurisdiction of financial statement certification. The certification requirement under section 906 is separate from the requirement under section 302.	<i>Not applicable</i>
Title X	Corporate Tax Returns	
1001	The chief executive officer, per the “sense of the senate,” should sign the federal income tax return of a corporation.	Institutions should review the level of authority of signers on the various tax returns; a senior financial manager with financial accountability for the information presented on the tax return should sign the return.
Title XI	Corporate Fraud Accountability	
1001 - 1004	Discusses fines, consequences, and sentencing for individuals and issuers.	<i>Not applicable</i>
1005	Gives the SEC the authority to prohibit anyone convicted of securities fraud from being an officer or director of any publicly traded company.	Institutions should consider securities fraud convictions relevant in background checks for new employees.
1006 - 1007	Addresses criminal penalties under the SEC Act of 1934 and penalties for retaliation against informants.	<i>Not applicable</i>