Southern warned it could lose accreditation
School docked for missing benchmarks in several categories

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Southern University was warned last week it could lose its accreditation required for the school to offer degrees and receive federal dollars.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges placed Southern University on a warning list during its June board meeting. The board is one of the six major accrediting bodies in the U.S. for higher education institutions.

Southern received the sanction because the school missed benchmarks related to its faculty, student achievement, “institutional effectiveness” and student complaints.

“In one year, the University will submit a report documenting the progress made in each area,” said university spokesman Henry Tillman in a statement. “Because the University has already begun to address each issue and significant progress has been made, we are confident that monitoring beyond next year will not be necessary.”

The warning list is the lightest of three possible penalties issued by the board. The board also can place schools on probation or revoke accreditation entirely.

Joseph Rallo, Louisiana higher education commissioner, is a former member of the board.

“It’s serious; it’s very serious,” Rallo said of Southern’s warning. “Without accreditation, basically the value of the degree is simply not there. If you are not accredited by SACS, you’re not able to dispense federal financial assistance. And at Southern University, if you can’t get Pell Grants, well you might as well shut your doors.”

Southern University officials did not provide details about the issues flagged in their report. But Rallo said based on the brief details made public by the board, the school likely was flagged for an insufficient number of faculty members. He said problems with faculty can

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in turn hurt student achievement levels and increase student complaints.

Rallo said some of Southern’s troubles could be related to state budget cuts the school has sustained over the past decade.

“A lot of these factors are driven by inadequate funding,” Rallo said. “With university funding being cut as dramatically as it has been, it’s very difficult to attract and retain faculty.”