



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **Policy Statement**

#### ***Overview***

The Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) substantive change policy and procedures assure the public that all aspects of an institution continue to meet standards. It helps ensure substantive changes, if approved, do not hinder an institution's ability to continue meeting the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation*.

A substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs and services.

SACSCOC accredits an entire institution. Accreditation extends to all programs and services of an institution wherever located and however delivered. SACSCOC does not accredit individual programs, locations, or portions of an institution. However, some new programs, locations, and other institutional changes are subject to notification and/or approval as defined in *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*.

#### ***Compliance***

Substantive changes, including those required by federal regulations, include:

- Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.
- Changing the legal status, form of control, or ownership of an institution.
- Changing the governance of an institution.
- Merging / consolidating two or more institutions or entities.
- Acquiring another institution or any program or location of another institution.
- Relocating an institution or an off-campus instructional site of an institution (including a branch campus).
- Offering courses or programs at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.
- Adding graduate programs at an institution previously offering only undergraduate programs (including degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other for-credit credential).
- Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non-time-based methods or measures.

- Adding a program that is a significant departure from the existing programs, or method of delivery, from those offered when the institution was last evaluated.
- Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.
- Adding an additional method of delivery to a currently offered program.
- Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement.
- Entering into a written arrangement under 34 C.F.R. § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.
- Substantially increase or decreasing the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of one or more programs.
- Adding competency-based education programs.
- Adding each competency-based education program by direct assessment.
- Adding programs with completion pathways that recognize and accommodate a student's prior or existing knowledge or competency.
- Awarding dual or joint academic awards.
- Re-opening a previously closed program or off-campus instructional site.
- Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.
- Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all student have completed their program of study.
- Closing an institution, a program, a method of delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.

Other substantive changes, including those required by federal regulations, include:

- An institution is required to notify or secure SACSCOC approval prior to implementing a substantive change.
- An institution is responsible for maintaining compliance at all times with Standard 14.2 (substantive change) of the *Principles of Accreditation* and with the *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* and related policies, viz.,
  - *Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards;*
  - *Credit Hours;*
  - *Direct Assessment Competency-based Educational Programs;*
  - *Distance and Correspondence Education;*
  - *Dual Enrollment;*
  - *Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status;* and
  - *Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level.*
- An institution is required to have a written substantive change policy and procedure. It must be approved through institutional processes and published in institutional documents accessible to those affected and to the public. The purpose of the institution's substantive change policy and procedure is to ensure all substantive changes are reported to SACSCOC in a timely fashion as required by *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. Institutions are responsible for implementing and enforcing their substantive change policy and procedure.
- An institution's fiscal and administrative capability to operate off-campus instructional sites is assessed when a new site is reviewed for approval and as part of decennial and fifth-year interim reviews.

- A new off-campus instructional site is subject to a substantive change committee visit. A committee visit, when necessary, is authorized when a site is approved. The committee visit ensures the site has the personnel, facilities, and resources identified by an institution in its application or prospectus and ensures the quality of instructional and support services offered at the site.
- Different or additional requirements apply to an institution on substantive change restriction. Restrictions apply if an institution that has been placed on Warning, Probation, or Probation for Good Cause, or if an institution is under provisional certification for participation in federal financial aid programs.
- An institution placed or continued on Probation or Probation for Good Cause must submit to SACSCOC an institutional contingency teach-out plan within 30 days of the notification of the Board of Trustees action.

### ***Non-compliance***

If an institution is non-compliant with *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* or Standard 14.2, its accreditation may be in jeopardy. An unreported substantive change may require a review of the institution's substantive change policy and procedures document by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Non-compliance subjects the institution to monitoring, sanction, or removal from membership. Failure to secure approval, if required, of a substantive change involving programs or locations that qualify for title IV federal funding may place the institution in jeopardy with the U.S. Department of Education, including reimbursement of funds received related to an unreported substantive change. For additional information, refer to Appendix A, Standards and Policy Addressing Unreported Substantive Change, in *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*.

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## Glossary of Terms

**Branch campus** - a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is

- permanent in nature
- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization and
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority

**Contractual Agreement** – typically is one in which an institution enters an agreement for receipt of courses/programs or portions of courses or programs (i.e., clinical training internships, etc.) delivered by another institution or service provider.

**Consortial Relationship** - A consortial relationship typically is one in which two or more institutions share in the responsibility of developing and delivering courses and programs that meet mutually agreed upon standards of academic quality.

**Cooperative Academic Arrangement** – An agreement between a member institution and another entity (or entities) to deliver program content transcribed by the member institution as its own (see Standard 10.9). Examples include geographic or denominational consortia, statewide distance education agreements, collaborative agreements with international institutions, and contractual instruction, among others.

**Correspondence education** - a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced.

**Degree completion program** – a program typically designed for a non-traditional undergraduate population such as working adults who have completed some college-level course work but have not achieved a baccalaureate degree. Students in such programs may transfer in credit from courses taken previously and may receive credit for experiential learning. Courses in degree completion programs are often offered in an accelerated format or meet during evening and weekend hours, or may be offered via distance learning technologies.

**Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs** - Federal regulations define a direct assessment competency-based educational program as an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, uses direct assessment of student learning relying solely on the attainment of defined competencies, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program using the results of the assessment.

**Distance education** - a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

**Dual degree** – separate program completion credentials each of which bears only the name, seal, and signature of the institution awarding the degree to the student.

**Educational program** – a coherent course of study leading to the awarding of a credential (i.e., a degree, diploma or certificate).

**Geographically separate** - an instructional site or branch campus that is located physically apart from the main campus of the institution.

**Joint degree** - a single program completion credential bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the two or more institutions awarding the degree to the student.

**Modified prospectus** - a prospectus submitted in lieu of a full prospectus for certain designated substantive changes. When a modified prospectus is acceptable, the Commission specifies requested information from the institution.

**Notification** - a letter from an institution's chief executive officer, or his/her designated representative, to SACSCOC President summarizing a proposed change, providing the intended implementation date, and listing the complete physical address if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site or branch campus. The policy and procedures for reporting and review of institutional substantive change are outlined in the document "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges."

**Significant departure** – a program that is not closely related to previously approved programs at the institution or site or for the mode of delivery in question. To determine whether a new program is a "significant departure," it is helpful to consider the following questions:

- What previously approved programs does the institution offer that are closely related to the new program and how are they related?
- Will significant additional equipment or facilities be needed?
- Will significant additional financial resources be needed?
- Will a significant number of new courses will be required?
- Will a significant number of new faculty members will be required?
- Will significant additional library/learning resources be needed?

**Teach-out agreement** - a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 50% or more of at least one program offered, ceases to operate before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. This applies to the closure of an institution, a site, or a program. Such a teach-out agreement requires SACSCOC approval in advance of implementation.

**Teach-out plan** - a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 50% or more of at least one program, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study, and may include, if required by the institution's accrediting agency, a teach-out agreement between institutions. This applies to the closure of an institution, a site, or a program. Teach-out plans must be approved by SACSCOC in advance of implementation.

## Procedures

### *Procedures for Reporting: An Overview*

There are three procedures for addressing the different types of substantive changes included in this document:

- Procedure One for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring *Approval Prior to Implementation* (Notification may also be required).
- Procedure Two for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring **Only Notification Prior to Implementation** (some changes also require submission of additional documents).
- Procedure Three for Closing a Program, Site, Branch Campus or Institution.

Procedures for the following types of changes are included in the separate SACSCOC policy [Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#):

- initiating a merger or consolidation;
- acquiring an institution or location (including programs) of another institution;
- initiating a change of ownership;
- initiating a change of governance, control, form, or legal status; and
- adding as a permanent off-campus instructional site a location at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution;

Procedures for approval of direct assessment competency-based education programs are in the separate SACSCOC policy [Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs](#).

The initiation or revision of programs not offered for academic credit and that are not eligible for federal financial aid does not require reporting; however, such programs are subject to review at the time of reaffirmation.

***Reporting the Various Types of Substantive Change***

The different types of substantive change, the specific procedure to be used for each, their respective approval/notification requirements, and their reporting time-lines are included in the table that follows. Please read the full text under the appropriate procedure for details regarding reporting.

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Initiating coursework or programs at a different level than currently approved	Procedure 1	No	Yes	<p><a href="#"><u>Application for Level Change</u></a></p> <p><b>Due dates:</b>            March 15 (for June review)            September 1 (for December review)</p>
Initiating off-campus sites where student can obtain 50% or more credits toward a program (including but not limited to Early College High School, dual enrollment programs offered at a high school, and certificate programs that are not at employer's request and not on short notice)	Procedure 1	No	Yes	<p>Cover Sheet  <a href="#"><u>Prospectus</u></a>            (See Appendix B of this document)</p> <p><b>Due dates:</b>            January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation            July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation</p>
Expanding at current degree level ( <i>significant departure from current programs</i> ).				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites by adding programs that ARE significantly different from current programs at the site AND at the institution				
Initiating degree completion programs				
Initiating a branch campus (See definition of "branch campus" on p. 3 of this document.)				
Initiating distance learning by offering 50% or more of the first program for the first time				
Relocating a main or branch campus				
Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides 25% or more of an educational program offered by the SACSCOC accredited institution				

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Initiating dual or joint degrees involving program expansion (significant departure) or initiating a new site where student can obtain 50% or more credits toward a program	See SACSCOC policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	No	Yes	Cover Sheet <a href="#">Prospectus</a> <a href="#">(See Appendix B of this document)</a>  <b>Due dates:</b> January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation  Copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution, and additional details on non-SACSCOC institution(s) involved. See Policy
Initiating dual or joint degree with at least one institution <u>not</u> accredited by SACSCOC	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	At least 6 months prior to implementation	Yes	Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution, and additional details on non-SACSCOC institution(s). See Policy.
Initiating a program or courses delivered through cooperative academic arrangement	Procedure 2	At least 6 months prior to implementation	No	Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution/entity
Initiating a direct assessment competency-based program	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs</a>	Yes – Screening Form	Yes	Submit “Screening Form” with letter of notification. If Prospectus is required, <b>Due dates:</b> March 15 (for June review) September 1 (for December review)
Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution	See SACSCOC Policy: <a href="#">Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status</a>	Yes: December 15 (for June review); June 1 (for December review)	Yes	Cover Sheet Institutional Summary Form Prospectus (See Appendix in SACSCOC Policy: <a href="#">Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status</a> )  <b>Due dates:</b> March 15 (for June review) September 1 (for December review)
Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution				
Acquiring an institution or location (including programs) of another institution				
Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing				

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Initiating a certificate program at a new off-campus site at employer's request and on short notice (previously approved program)	Procedure 1	No	Yes	Cover Sheet Modified prospectus Contact Commission Staff.
Initiating a certificate program that is a significant departure from previously approved programs at employer's request and on short notice				
Adding a site under a U.S. military contract for a previously approved program				
Altering significantly the length of a program				
Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution				
Changing from clock hours to credit hours	Procedure 1	No	Yes	Justify reasons for change, indicate calculation of equivalency, and other pertinent information
Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographic area)	Procedure 2	Yes	No	Letter of notification with old address, new address, and implementation date
Initiating dual or joint degrees with other SACSCOC accredited institution(s)	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	At least 6 months prior to implementation	No	Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution. See Policy.
Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium	Procedure 2	Yes	No	Letter of notification and copy of signed agreement
Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides less than 25% of an educational program offered by the SACSCOC accredited institution				

<b>Types of Change</b>	<b>Procedure or Policy</b>	<b>Prior Notification Required</b>	<b>Prior Approval Required</b>	<b>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</b>
Initiating off-campus sites where student can obtain 25-49% of credits toward a program (including but not limited to Early College High School, dual enrollment programs offered at a high school, and certificate programs that are not at employer's request and not on short notice)	Procedure 2	Yes	No	Letter of notification Including street address and implementation date
Initiating distance learning by offering 25-49 of the first program for the first time				
Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution where the institution plans to teach out its own students	Procedure 3	Yes	Yes	Description of teach-out plan included with letter of notification
Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution where the institution plans contracts with another institution(s) to teach-out students (Teach-out Agreement)	Procedure 3	Yes	Yes	Description of teach-out plan, copy of signed teach-out agreement(s) detailing terms included with notification

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice using existing approved courses and location	NA	No	No	NA
Initiating certificate program (not at employer's request and not on short notice) using existing approved courses and location				
Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School and dual enrollment programs offered at the high school) where student can obtain 24% or less of credits toward a program				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites by adding approved programs that ARE NOT significantly different from current programs at the site				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites by adding approved programs that ARE significantly different from current programs at the site but NOT at the institution				
Initiating distance learning by offering 24% or less of any program for the first time				

## ***Required Committee Visits***

The following six types of substantive changes require on-site committee reviews within six months after implementation. The President of SACSCOC also is authorized to appoint a Substantive Change Committee to review an institution for any change requiring a more in-depth evaluation beyond the prospectus submitted by the institution. In all cases, the ensuing Report of the Substantive Change Committee will be used by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to determine the ongoing accreditation status of an institution.

1. The initiation of an additional off-campus site/location at which a student can earn at least 50% of the credit toward an educational program, if any of the following applies: (a) the institution has a total of three or fewer additional locations, or (b) the institution has not demonstrated, to the satisfaction of SACSCOC, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations, or (c) the institution has been placed on sanction by SACSCOC or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation, or (d) the institution has been accredited by SACSCOC for less than ten years.

SACSCOC will conduct visits to the first three off-campus locations initiated by an institution that offer 50% or more of the credit for at least one program.

When an institution initiates its fourth off-campus site/location where 50% or more of a program's credits are offered, SACSCOC may, at its discretion, choose not to conduct visits to any of these additional sites at the times of their initiation if the institution has previously demonstrated a record of effective oversight of its off-campus educational locations and has not been placed on sanction. However, SACSCOC will require visits to a representative sample of sites at the fifth-year interval between scheduled reaffirmations if (1) the additional sites have been initiated since the last scheduled reaffirmation and (2) the sites have not been visited. At any time, SACSCOC may choose to authorize visits to new sites developed between the fifth-year review and the next scheduled reaffirmation of accreditation.

At the time of reaffirmation, SACSCOC will conduct a thorough review of a representative sample of additional locations/sites where a student can obtain 50% or more of course work toward an educational program. The extent of the review will depend, in part, on whether there has been a recent review of the site(s).

2. The initiation of a branch campus. A branch campus is defined as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is
  - permanent in nature
  - offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential
  - has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization and
  - has its own budgetary and hiring authority

If it is determined that a branch campus has sufficient autonomy, the institution may be directed to seek separate accreditation for the unit. (See SACSCOC policy [\*Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution\*](#).)

3. The initiation of a change in governance/ownership with a change in control. (See SACSCOC policy [\*Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status\*](#).)
4. The initiation of mergers/consolidations. (See SACSCOC policy [\*Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status\*](#).)
5. The initiation of coursework, credit certificates, or degree programs at a different level than currently approved by SACSCOC. (Depending on the existing related programs offered by an institution, a

committee visit may not be required for institutions moving from Levels III to IV or from Levels V to VI. See level classifications on page 14 of this document.)

6. The initiation of a direct assessment competency-based education program (at least 50% direct assessment). See SACSCOC policy [Direct Assessment Competency Based Educational Programs](#).

### ***Policy Statements Regarding Substantive Change***

1. The [Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement](#) applies to all programs and services of SACSCOC-accredited institutions wherever they are located or however they are delivered. Failure to comply with the *Principles* or with procedures referred to in this policy could result in the institution being placed on sanction or being removed from membership.
2. Denial of approval of substantive change is not appealable. An institution that fails to gain approval of the substantive change may resubmit a revised prospectus or application following the guidelines and time frames described in the Table on pages 8-12 of this document.
3. An accredited institution engaged in the appeals process, the arbitration process, or in litigation with SACSCOC is not eligible for consideration of substantive change.
4. The SACSCOC substantive change policy applies only to SACSCOC-accredited institutions. Applicant and candidate institutions may not initiate substantive change.
5. Procedures One, Two, and Three may not address all substantive changes that SACSCOC will review in the interim between an institution's reaffirmation cycles. Therefore, the SACSCOC reserves the right to classify significant changes other than those described above as substantive in nature and to follow up accordingly. The follow-up procedure may include a committee visit.
6. An institution may withdraw its prospectus/application or may discontinue substantive change at any time during the review process by submitting a formal letter of withdrawal to the President of SACSCOC.
7. Once an institution submits its prospectus or application and the document is reviewed by either the Committee on Compliance and Reports or by SACSCOC staff, any information included therein that indicates possible non-compliance with any of the *Principles of Accreditation* may lead SACSCOC to review the institution further, even if the prospectus is withdrawn or approval of the change is denied.
8. SACSCOC staff review all substantive changes requiring notification prior to implementation and conduct a preliminary review of all changes requiring approval. All substantive changes described in Procedure One require approval. If there is a favorable staff review, the staff makes recommendations to the SACSCOC Executive Council for action between dates of SACSCOC Board of Trustee meetings. SACSCOC staff may also refer a case to the full Board of Trustees for review at the June or December Board meeting. The following cases require review by the full Board in June or December:
  - a proposed substantive change requiring prior approval submitted by an institution currently on sanction. Proposals to close a program or an off-site instructional site by an institution on sanction will be reviewed and, if appropriate, approved by Commission staff.
  - a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution recently removed from sanction with particular attention to those involving non-compliance with Core Requirement 13.1 (*Financial resources*), Core Requirement 13.2 (*Financial documents*), or Standard 13.3 (*Financial responsibility*).
  - a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution currently on reimbursement for Title IV federal funding.

- the prospectus of an institution planning a merger/consolidation, change of legal status, governance, ownership or form of control. (See SACSCOC Policy [Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#)).
  - the prospectus for approval of a direct assessment competency-based educational program (50% or more of a program) (See SACSCOC Policy [Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs](#)).
9. If an institution fails to report or to gain approval of a substantive change prior to its implementation and the nature of that change is not described in the list in item 8 above or those listed under Procedure One, the substantive change will be reviewed and, if possible, acted upon by staff. The issue of late submission, however, will be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action. If an institution fails to report or to gain approval of a substantive change prior to its implementation and the proposed change is among those included in the list in item 8 above or those listed under Procedure One, both the prospectus/application and the issue of late submission will be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action.
  10. All final decisions regarding the accreditation status of an institution are made by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Denial of substantive change and the imposition of sanctions are not appealable actions.
  11. Substantive changes of the types described in Procedures One and Two normally will not affect an institution's cycle of reaffirmation of accreditation
  12. Following the approval of a degree level change by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, an institution may not initiate additional programs at the new degree level until after the Board takes positive action on its continued accreditation following the Substantive Change Committee visit authorized at the time of approval.
  13. The date of the letter of approval of a substantive change is considered the date on which the change is included as part of the institution's accreditation.
  14. Substantive changes must be implemented within two years of approval. If an institution does not implement within two years of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees approval date, then a new prospectus or application must be submitted and approved by the Board prior to implementation.
  15. Extensive substantive changes by an institution may accelerate the date for the institution's next reaffirmation. Examples of triggers for an accelerated reaffirmation include the following changes: proliferation of branches or off-campus sites, frequent mergers or consolidations with other institutions, significant increases in enrollments, or rapid proliferation of new educational programs.
  16. If an institution fails to follow SACSCOC substantive change policy and procedures, it may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money received by the institution for programs related to the unreported substantive change. In addition, the institution's case may be referred to SACSCOC Board of Trustees for the imposition of a sanction or for removal from membership. (See also Appendix A regarding standards and policies addressing unreported substantive change.)
  17. If an institution has educational programs and off-campus instructional sites that are inactive but not closed, the following applies:
    - If an institution does not enroll students in an educational program for five years, then after five years of no students enrolled and no major course offered for the educational program (if that educational program is a significant departure from other educational programs currently offered by the institution), the institution must submit a prospectus to reinstate the educational program prior to admitting students into and offering major courses for the educational program.
    - If an institution does not offer courses or programs at an approved off-campus instructional site for five years, then, after five years of no students enrolled and no courses offered at the off-campus instructional site, the institution must submit a prospectus for approval of the off-campus instructional site to reinstate any educational program at the off-campus instructional site whereby

a student can obtain 50 percent or more credits toward any educational program offered by the institution.

The Commission will use information collected on the institution's completed "Institutional Summary Form Prepared for SACSCOC Review," submitted as part of the fifth-year and decennial reviews, as the mechanism for reporting the above educational programs and instructional sites that are deemed by the institution to be inactive but not closed.

### ***Fees and Expenses***

1. The following fees will be assessed to institutions for the review of an application or prospectus:

\$500 For an institution seeking review of a substantive change prospectus or application for level change

An institution may submit a single prospectus covering up to 10 off-campus sites that offer dual enrollment programs as long as the program offerings are identical. The assessment for the prospectus will be the same \$500 as for a prospectus for a single site. Additional sites would need to be submitted individually unless the program offerings at the additional sites are identical (again, up to 10 sites).

\$500 Per SACSCOC member institution for a substantive change involving multiple institutions (e.g., merger/consolidation, acquisition, change of ownership, or collaborative program)

\$7,500 Per non-SACSCOC member institution for a substantive change involving multiple institutions (e.g., merger/consolidation, acquisition, change of ownership, or collaborative program). The SACSCOC accredited institution(s) are responsible for ensuring payment.

2. Fees related to Substantive Change Committee visits

In addition to the fee assessed for reviewing the substantive change prospectus, the following total cost will be assessed to an institution hosting a Substantive Change Committee visit:

The actual cost of the committee  
(Includes travel, lodging, food, Incidental Fee for each reviewer, and related expenses), ***and***

\$2,000 administrative fee

#### **Document history:**

*Revised for the Principles of Accreditation: February 2004*

*Adopted: Commission on Colleges, June 2008*

*Revised: Board of Trustees, Commission on Colleges, June 2009, June 2011, December 2011*

*Revised: Executive Council, March 2012 and Board of Trustees, June 2012*

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*Revised for the Principles of Accreditation: January 2018*

*Revised: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2018; December 2018; September 2020*

## PROCEDURE ONE

### The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Approval Prior to Implementation

#### *Changes Requiring Approval*

Substantive changes requiring submission of an application or a prospectus, and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees prior to implementation by the institution are as follows:

1. **Initiating coursework, certificates, or programs of study at a different level than those previously approved by SACSCOC.** Institutions may not offer individual credit courses or programs at a degree level that has not been approved by SACSCOC. Examples of level changes requiring approval include: an associate degree-granting college initiating bachelor's degrees or a four-year institution initiating degrees at the master's level; a graduate-level-only institution initiating degrees at the undergraduate level, a baccalaureate degree-granting institution initiating occupational and technical degrees at the associate degree level. An institution requesting a level change should complete the application form found in the SACSCOC policy [Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level](#).

**Note: Repackaging of an existing approved curriculum** to create a new degree level, such as an institution that offers a full 120-hour baccalaureate program creating an associate degree from its lower-division offerings, usually requires only advance notification, not approval.

SACSCOC classifies institutions according to the highest degree level offered by an institution. Those classifications are as follows:

Level I	Offers the associate degree as the highest degree
Level II	Offers the baccalaureate degree as the highest degree
Level III	Offers the master's degree as the highest degree
Level IV	Offers the master's and specialist degree as the highest degrees
Level V	Offers three or fewer doctorate degrees as highest degrees
Level VI	Offers four or more doctorate degrees

An institution adding a fourth doctorate degree will automatically be reclassified from Level V to Level VI. Applications for a change from Level III to Level IV will be reviewed and, if possible, approved by staff.

2. **Initiating certificate programs for workforce development.** These are typically offered at the request of an employer, either on campus or at the workplace. Offering previously approved certificate programs at an unapproved off-campus site requires approval of the site prior to implementation. Similarly, offering a certificate program that is a significant departure from existing approved certificate programs, either on or off campus, requires approval of the program prior to implementation. SACSCOC will accept a modified prospectus consisting of the name of the certificate, date of implementation, the complete physical address of the off-campus site (if applicable), a faculty roster, a discipline-specific description of library/learning resources, a description of physical facilities, and descriptions of courses to be offered at the site.
3. **Initiating other certificate programs.** Certificate programs consisting of courses drawn from the existing approved curriculum for a degree or diploma program do not require separate approval; they are considered to be included in the institution's current accreditation. However, to offer such a certificate at a new site requires approval of the site. A certificate that is a significant departure from previously approved programs must be approved in advance—the same as any other new educational program.
4. **Initiating an off-campus (additional) site (site-based/classroom group instruction) at which students can earn at least 50% of the credits toward an educational program.** Locations at which instruction is

offered by distance delivery, but students must be present on-site to access such instruction, are considered off-campus instructional sites and must be approved in advance.

Approval of an off-campus site is effective for a maximum of five years and will be reviewed again in the context of the fifth-year or decennial review.

For an institution replicating an approved educational program that is already offered at three or more approved sites, a modified prospectus consisting of a faculty roster, descriptions of the courses to be offered at the site, a description of discipline-specific library resources, a description of student support services, and a description of physical resources will suffice in lieu of responding to the requirements of a full prospectus.

5. **Adding a site for a previously approved program under a U.S. military contract.** Institutions that enter into contracts with the U.S. military to offer programs at off-campus instruction sites must obtain approval for the curricula and delivery systems prior to entering into the contract if the programs and delivery systems are not already approved. Thereafter, SACSCOC will accept a modified prospectus that includes the date of the program start, the physical location of the site (including street address), a listing of the approved programs that will be offered at the site, a brief description of academic (library/learning resources, etc.) and student support services available at the site, and a faculty roster identifying projected qualified instructors for courses offered through at least the first full term at the site.
6. **Initiating degree completion programs.** Degree completion programs usually include a compressed format with classes offered evenings or weekends to accommodate working adults, a requirement to transfer in some amount of previous college credit, and may include offering credit for career or life experience. The prospectus should include a discussion of how the degree completion program differs from the same program offered in traditional form, and how the institution will ensure that student learning outcomes are the same for both offerings. An example of such a change is adult or accelerated programs in management or organizational leadership.
7. **Initiating a branch campus.** A branch campus is defined as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature, (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential, (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization, and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority. The prospectus for a proposed branch campus must include a business plan for the branch campus that describes:
  - The educational program(s) to be offered at the branch campus;
  - The projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus; and
  - The operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus.
8. **Initiating distance learning or correspondence courses and programs by which students can earn at least 50% of a program's credits through delivery in a format other than face-to-face.** Institutions must demonstrate that a student who registers for a distance or correspondence course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. Means of verification might include a secure login and pass code, proctored examinations, or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification. Processes used to verify student identity must also protect student privacy. Please see also the SACSCOC policy [\*Distance and Correspondence Education\*](#).
9. **Expanding at the institution's current degree level** (significant departure from current programs). What constitutes a "significant departure" from existing programs depends on what related programs are currently in place at a given institution. Refer to the Glossary of Terms for more specificity. Examples include the following: developing a new general education program, adding a master's degree in nursing when the institution is accredited at Level III but currently offers only a master's degree in education; an institution accredited at Level II (bachelor's degrees), offering only a bachelor's degree with a major in religion, adding three new bachelor's degrees with majors in biology, business administration, and computer science.
10. **Initiating a significant change in the established mission of the institution.** Significant changes in mission are those that lead to a fundamental shift in the nature of the institution. Examples include the following:

the transformation of a technical college into a comprehensive community college, the initiation by a seminary of significant liberal arts offerings, the addition by a medical college of general education offerings, the initiation of an engineering school at a liberal arts institution. Editorial changes in the language of a mission statement are not substantive and need not be reported. See Commission staff regarding the prospectus. The change in mission may dictate a mix of required documentation.

11. **Changing from clock hours to credit hours.** The prospectus must include a clear explanation of the formula used to calculate equivalency of credit awarded. Please see also the SACSCOC policy [Credit Hours](#).
12. **Changing significantly the length of a program, substantially increasing or decreasing the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program.** Significant changes in program length are those with noticeable impact on the program's completion time. Examples include the following: expanding a certificate program from 250 contact hours to 450 contact hours; increasing a baccalaureate degree from 124 hours to 150 hours.
13. **Relocating a main or branch campus.** The prospectus should demonstrate that the new facilities maintain the institution's compliance with Standards 13.7 (Physical resources) and 13.8 (Institutional environment).
14. **Initiating a collaborative academic program with another institution not accredited by SACSCOC.** The prospectus should demonstrate compliance with the SACSCOC policy [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#). Examples include joint degree or dual degree programs.
15. **Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement with an entity not certified to participate in U.S. Department of Education Title IV programs.** Approval is required if the entity (or entities) provides 25 percent or more of an educational program offered by the member institution. The prospectus must include (1) a copy of the signed agreement with the entity (or entities) and (2) the names and contact information of the agreement's primary responsible party at each entity (including the member institution).

## ***The Procedure for Approval***

### **Time of Notification**

An institution undergoing substantive change requiring prior approval must provide written notification of the change to the President of SACSCOC in accord with the designated times outlined in the table on pages 6-9 of this document. In some cases, prior notification is not required.

*If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact SACSCOC staff for consultation.*

### **Submission of a Prospectus or an Application**

**Prospectus:** Prospectuses may be submitted in print form or on flash drive, CD or DVD (submit one copy). Once the prospectus has been submitted, the institution may advertise and recruit students to a new program or site as long as all materials clearly state that the program or site is pending approval by SACSCOC. Prospectuses will not be accepted via email. In addition, all transmittals must include the required cover sheet and state the planned date of implementation. There is a different prospectus for changes governed by these policies:

- [Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#)
- [Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs](#)

**Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level:** The application for change of degree level must be submitted by **March 15** for consideration at the June meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, or by **September 1** for consideration at the December meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to allow ample time for review and approval. Four copies of the completed

application should be submitted to the President of SACSCOC as a print document or on flash drive, CD or DVD. Applications must include the required cover sheet and must include the planned date of implementation.

### **Staff Options**

Upon receipt of a substantive change **prospectus**, a SACSCOC staff member will review the prospectus and any supporting material submitted by the institution and will recommend to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees one of the actions listed below:

1. approve the substantive change or
2. refer the substantive change to the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports for review and a final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

### **Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports Following Review of the Prospectus or of the Application**

Prospectus: The Committee will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the prospectus and recommend approval of the program, with or without a site visit. A site visit is required within six months after the initiation of the following approved substantive changes:
  - (a) consolidation/merger; a change of ownership resulting in a change of control; change of governance, ownership, legal status
  - (b) a branch campus
  - (c) an off-campus site at which a student can earn at least 50% of the credit toward an educational program, if any of the following applies: the institution
    - has a total of three or fewer additional locations at which 50% or more of a programs credits are offered, or
    - has not demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations, or
    - has been placed on sanction by SACSCOC or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation
2. defer action and seek additional information
3. recommend denial of approval of the substantive change and continue the institution's accreditation. The reason for denial of approval may have been caused by an institution's current non-compliance with a standard or requirement. Consequently, denial may be accompanied by monitoring or imposition of a sanction.

### Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level:

An application for offering programs at a level different from that for which the institution is approved is automatically referred to the Committees on Compliance and Reports, except for a change in degree level from III to IV which is reviewed by staff. The Committee will review the application and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the application and approve the program, with a site visit within six months after initiation of the substantive change
2. defer action and seek additional information
3. deny approval of the substantive change and continue the institution's accreditation. The reason for denial of approval may have been caused by an institution's current non-compliance with a standard or requirement. Consequently, denial may be accompanied by monitoring or imposition of a sanction.

### **Preparation for a Substantive Change Committee Visit**

When a Substantive Change Committee is authorized, it is charged with determining the institution's continued compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* following the initiation of the change. The visit will occur within six months after initiation of the change. In preparation for this visit, the institution will complete the appropriate substantive change documentation template which cites relevant Standards and the roster of faculty members who will be teaching in the program or at the site. Both the template and the Faculty Roster form are available on the SACSCOC Web site ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)) under "Substantive Changes." The institution's SACSCOC staff representative will inform the institution of the composition and schedule for the Committee.

### **Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports Following Review by a Substantive Change Committee**

The report of the Substantive Change Committee, together with the response of the institution to the recommendations contained in that report (due within five months of the Committee visit), will be reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports. The Committee on Compliance and Reports may recommend one of the following actions:

1. continue the institution in accreditation, with or without a monitoring report.
2. continue the institution in accreditation, impose a sanction, and request a monitoring report, with/without a special committee visit (mandatory visit if placed on Probation).
3. remove the institution from membership.

## PROCEDURE TWO

### The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Only Notification Prior to Implementation

#### *Changes Requiring Notification Only*

Substantive changes requiring an institution to notify the President of SACSCOC prior to implementation by the institution are as follows:

1. For site-based/classroom group instruction (where the instructor is present)
  - a. **Initiating an off-campus site at which a student may earn at least 25% but less than 50% of credits toward a program.** The letter of notification must include the starting date and complete physical address of the new site.
  - b. **Moving an approved off-campus instructional site within the same geographic area to serve essentially the same pool of students.** The letter of notification must include the complete physical address of the old site, the complete physical address of the new site, and the starting date of the new site.
2. For distance learning/technology-based group or individual instruction (where the instructor and student are geographically separated), **offering for the first time credit courses via distance learning/technology-based instruction by which students can obtain at least 25% but less than 50% of their credits toward an educational program.**
3. **Initiating a program or courses delivered through a cooperative academic arrangement.** If the member institution meets either of the following conditions, the cooperative academic arrangement is subject to notification prior to implementation:
  - 50 percent or more of a program is offered through the arrangement (-or-)
  - The member institution could not deliver the program without the arrangement (i.e., is currently dependent on the arrangement to deliver the program)

If neither of these conditions is met, the arrangement does not constitute a substantive change; the member institution should not submit a notification to SACSCOC.

Notification must include (1) the names of the institutions/entities and the programs involved, (2) a copy of the signed agreement, (3) the names and contact information of the agreement's primary responsible party at each entity (including the member institution), (4) the implementation date, and (5) a mechanism for ensuring quality and integrity. This requirement *does not apply* to articulation agreements with other institutions, clinical agreements, or internship agreements.

4. **Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides less than 25% of an educational program offered by the accredited institution.** A copy of the signed agreement must be provided.
5. **Repackaging of an existing approved curriculum** to create a new degree level, such as an institution that offers a full 120-hour baccalaureate program creating an associate degree from its lower-division offerings, usually requires only advance notification, not approval

## ***Review Procedure***

### **Time of Notification**

An institution undergoing substantive change must provide written notification of the change to the President of SACSCOC prior to implementation. The letter must include the date of implementation of the proposed change, and for an off-campus site, the complete physical address of the location. If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact SACSCOC staff for consultation.

### **Staff Options**

Upon receipt and review of the substantive change notification, SACSCOC staff will recommend one of the following options to the President of SACSCOC:

1. acknowledge receipt of the notification and indicate that the change will be included in the scope of the institution's accreditation
2. acknowledge receipt of the notification and request additional information.

Upon receipt and review of additional information, if requested, SACSCOC staff may recommend one of the following options to the SACSCOC President:

1. acknowledge receipt of the additional information and include the change in the scope of the institution's accreditation,
2. refer the substantive change to the Board of Trustees of SACSCOC for review,
3. authorize a substantive change visit,
4. take other action as may be appropriate.

## PROCEDURE THREE

### **Closing a Program, Instructional Site, Branch Campus or an Institution: Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements**

In accordance with Federal regulations, **an institution is required to submit a teach-out plan to SACSCOC for approval if any of the following occurs:**

1. The USDOE notifies the Commission that it has initiated an emergency action against an institution or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any Title IV, HEA program.
2. The Commission terminates accreditation or candidacy.
3. The institution notifies the Commission that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides at least 50% of at least one program.
4. A State Licensing or authorizing agency notifies the Commission that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.

If an institution decides to close an educational program, approved instructional site, branch campus, or the entire institution, it must submit to SACSCOC a teach-out plan for approval. If the plan includes teach-out agreements, then the agreements must also be approved prior to implementation.

Teach-out plans and teach-out agreements must be approved by SACSCOC prior to implementation. *See also* the SACSCOC Good Practices document [Closing a Program, Site, Branch or Institution](#).

#### ***Teach-out Plans***

A teach-out plan is a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides fifty percent or more of at least one program, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study, and may include, if required by the institution's accrediting agency, a teach-out agreement between institutions. Teach-out plans must be approved by SACSCOC in advance of implementation.

To be approved, a teach-out plan must include the following information:

1. Date of closure (date when new students will no longer be admitted)
2. An explanation of how affected parties (students, faculty, staff) will be informed of the impending closure
3. An explanation of how all affected students will be helped to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption
4. An indication as to whether the teach-out plan will incur additional charges/expenses to the students and, if so, how the students will be notified
5. Copies of signed teach-out agreements with other institutions, if any
6. How faculty and staff will be redeployed or helped to find new employment
7. If closing an institution, arrangement for the storing of student records, disposition of final financial resources and other assets

Following review and approval of a teach-out plan that includes a program that is accredited by another accrediting agency, the Commission will notify that accreditor of its approval.

### ***Teach-out Agreements***

A teach-out agreement is a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides fifty percent or more of at least one program offered, ceases to operate before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. Such a teach-out agreement requires SACSCOC approval in advance of implementation.

For approval by SACSCOC, the agreement must be between institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, be consistent with applicable standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* and with SACSCOC policies, and provide for the equitable treatment of students by ensuring that:

1. the teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the closed institution; and
2. the teach-out institution demonstrates that it can provide students access to the program(s) and services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances.

Please see the SACSCOC Good Practices document [Closing a Program, Site, Branch or Institution](#) for additional discussion of issues regarding closing of programs, sites, branch campuses or institutions.

### ***Closing an institution without an agreement***

If an institution accredited by SACSCOC closes and is no longer accredited, SACSCOC will seek assistance from the United States Department of Education and appropriate state agencies to help its students find reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional expense.

### ***Approval Process***

#### **Time of Notification**

As soon as the decision to close is made, the institution should provide to SACSCOC at the same time the following two pieces of information: (1) notification of the intended closing of a program, site, branch campus, or institution and (2) a teach-out plan for approval (including any teach-out agreements with other institutions).

#### **Staff Options**

Upon receipt and review of the notification of impending closure, SACSCOC staff will recommend that the President of SACSCOC acknowledge receipt of the notification and request the teach-out plan if was not included with the notification. Upon receipt and review of the teach-out plan, SACSCOC staff may recommend one of the following options to the SACSCOC President:

1. request additional information for the teach-out plan
2. approve the teach-out plan

## **Appendix A: Current Standards and Policy Statements Addressing Unreported Substantive Change**

### **1. Principles of Accreditation, Standard 14.2**

The institution has a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported in accordance with SACSCOC policy.

### **2. Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports – Policy Statement**

If an institution fails to report a substantive change that requires prior approval or prior notification, the committee will take the following actions:

- a) If discovered during the off-site review. The Off-Site Review Committee will mark Standard 14.2 out of compliance. The institution will be able to address the omission in its Focused Report and before the on-site review.
- b) If discovered during the on-site review. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee will mark Standard 14.2 out of compliance and write a recommendation. The institution will address the recommendation in its response to the Commission.

### **3. Policy Statement on Unreported Substantive Change**

Unreported substantive changes requiring prior notification or prior approval come to the attention of the Commission through two means: (1) information discovered by the institution or by the Commission between periods of formal review by the Commission and (2) information discovered during an off-site or an on-site review by the Commission. The procedure for handling such unreported substantive changes is as follows:

- a) Upon discovery, the institution formally notifies the SACSCOC President of the unreported substantive change. The letter of notification must include the date of the original implementation of the change. A completed prospectus or application should accompany the letter for cases outlined in **Procedure One** of this document.
- b) Commission staff will review the substantive change prospectus, if required; and any additional information that may have been requested. Following analysis, Commission staff will recommend to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees one of the following actions:
  1. approve the program, with or without a site visit;
  2. refer the prospectus to the Committee on Compliance and Reports for review at its next meeting (June or December); or
  3. acknowledge receipt of the notification and indicate that the change will be included in the scope of the institution's accreditation (an option only if prior notification is required).
- c) The issue of failure to comply with Standard 14.2 of the *Principles of Accreditation* (Substantive change) will be forwarded automatically to the Commission's Board of Trustees for action at its next meeting, if the change required prior approval. If the change required prior notification only, the issue of failure to report will be addressed in correspondence from the SACSCOC President.
- d) If the unreported substantive change requiring prior notification or prior approval is discovered during the institution's off-site or on-site review for reaffirmation, SACSCOC will follow the procedure found in the policy Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports. If it is

discovered during review by another type of SACSCOC committee, the review committee will write a recommendation. The recommendation will ask the institution to report the change in writing to SACSCOC and to provide in its response to the Committee Report a statement describing internal procedures established that would ensure future substantive change reporting and evidence that the procedures have been implemented. The institution's response will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees of SACSCOC for action on failure to report a substantive change.

### **Failure to Comply with Reporting Requirements**

If an institution fails to follow SACSCOC substantive change policy and procedures, it may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money received by the institution for programs related to the unreported substantive change. In addition, the institution's case may be referred to SACSCOC Board of Trustees for the imposition of a sanction or for removal from membership.

## Appendix B: The Substantive Change Prospectus

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Use this information to determine the content and process for submitting a prospectus for a “Procedure One” substantive change requiring approval prior to implementation.

The Prospectus must be accompanied with a completed [Cover Sheet](#).

### **Do not use this information for**

- mergers, consolidations, change of ownership, acquisitions, and change of governance, control, form, or legal status (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Mergers.pdf>),
  - direct assessment competency-based educational programs (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/DirectAssessmentCompetencyBased.pdf>), or
  - level changes (<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2020/01/Level-Change-for-Member-Institutions-1.pdf>).
- 

Before developing a prospectus, please review all of the information below concerning the content of the prospectus and how to submit the prospectus. When developing a prospectus, respond to all of the applicable requests for information.

**Please remember that the prospectus should address the specific substantive change for which you are requesting approval.** For example, if you are seeking approval for an off-campus site where adult, employed students will be enrolled in a graduate degree program, address specifically only the student support services that those students will need and describe how the support will be provided. Do not describe student support services that those students will not need such as athletic programs, dormitories, cafeterias, and other on-campus services that they cannot access.

### **How to Submit the Prospectus**

- **Each submission must include the following in the order listed:**
  1. Transmittal letter signed by an institutional representative which briefly explains the submission
  2. “[Cover Sheet for Submission of Substantive Changes Requiring Approval](#)” form (available on the Substantive Change webpage at [www.sacscoc.org/SubstantiveChange.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/SubstantiveChange.asp)).
  3. Name, telephone number, and email address of the person who may be contacted concerning questions about the prospectus.
  4. A list of degrees and majors which the institution is authorized to grant (photocopy from the catalog is acceptable)
  5. A list of existing **approved** off-campus sites and their addresses. **Note:** an approved site is one for which a prospectus has been submitted and which SACSCOC has approved to offer 50% or more of a program. A site where 25-49% of a program is offered is not considered to be an “approved” site; it is a site for which only notification has been accepted by SACSCOC.
  6. Prospectus (should be no longer than 25 pages plus appendices)
- **Submit only one** copy of the above materials to the President of SACSCOC at the address listed on the Cover Sheet.
- Submit the **Transmittal Letter and Cover Sheet** in hard copy (paper).
- Submit the body of the prospectus itself in hard copy (paper), flash drive, CD or DVD.

**Documents will not be accepted via e-mail.**

**Special Note:** SACSCOC will accept documentation submitted for approval to a system office or to a state coordinating or governing board, provided such documentation includes all the information required in a prospectus as listed below. **However,** the submission must include the completed [Cover Sheet](#) and Transmittal Letter and **must contain an index** correlating the documentation submitted to another entity with the corresponding information required in a prospectus.

Submissions lacking a clear, easily used index will not be accepted and will be returned to the institution without review. Faculty qualifications must be documented using the [Faculty Roster Form](#), utilizing the [Faculty Roster instructions](#). Curriculum vitae submitted in lieu of a faculty roster will not be accepted and will result in the submission being returned to the institution without review.

**Please note** that SACSCOC reserves the right to make amendments to the requirements outlined below for certain types of changes.

## Required Components of the Prospectus

### 1. ABSTRACT (limit to one page or less)

- Describe the proposed change with its date of implementation.
- If a new program, identify where it will be offered.
- If a new off-campus site or branch, list its complete physical address.
- Provide projected number of students, if applicable.
- Indicate the projected life of the program or site, if applicable (single cohort or ongoing).
- Describe the primary target audience.
- Describe the instructional delivery methods to be used.
- Describe strengths of the institution to undertake this change.

### 2. DETERMINATION OF NEED FOR THE CHANGE/RELATIONSHIP TO MISSION/PLANNING AND APPROVALS FOR THE CHANGE

- Describe how the change is consistent with the mission and goals of the institution.
- Describe the rationale and need for the program to include how the institution determined need.
- Provide evidence of legal authority for the change if approval is required by the governing board or the state.
- Provide documentation that faculty and appropriate other groups were involved in planning for and approval(s) of the change.

### 3. REQUIRED INFORMATION FOR THE SPECIFIC SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE (SELECT THE CHANGE RELEVANT TO THE PROSPECTUS AND PROVIDE ALL INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR THAT PARTICULAR CHANGE)

For a **NEW PROGRAM** provide the following information:

- Provide the curriculum for the program and a projected schedule of course offerings.
- Provide specific programmatic goals (objectives) and specific student learning outcomes for the program.
- Describe how the student learning outcomes **for the program** will be assessed.
- Provide course descriptions for all courses in the proposed program.
- Describe admissions and graduation requirements for the program.
- Demonstrate compliance with Standard 10.7 (Policies for awarding credit) of the *Principles of Accreditation*.
- Describe administrative oversight to ensure the quality of the program.
- For a program offered in compressed time frames, describe the methodology for determining that levels of knowledge and competencies comparable to those required in traditional formats have been achieved.
- Follow instructions in item 4 below for providing information concerning number and qualifications of faculty scheduled to teach in the program.

For a **NEW OFF-CAMPUS SITE OR BRANCH CAMPUS** provide the following information:

- Identify whether the site is a branch campus or an instructional site. The definitions of “branch campus” and “instructional site” may be found on pages 5-6 of the *Principles of Accreditation*. See also Procedure One in the policy entitled [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#). **Note: An institution is required**

**to present itself and its sites to SACSCOC in the exact way it presents itself to the U.S. Department of Education.**

- Describe the educational program(s) to be offered at the site or branch. If a program to be offered at the site or branch is a new program requiring approval, also respond to the requirements for a new program listed above.
- Describe any differences in admission, curriculum, or graduation requirements for students enrolled at the new site or branch or any special arrangements for grading, transcripts, or transfer policies.
- Describe how programs at the new site or branch will be monitored and evaluated and how they will be incorporated into the institutional evaluation and assessment processes.
- Describe the administrative structure for overseeing the site or branch campus.
- Describe how services and operations at the new site or branch will be evaluated.
- Follow instructions in item 4 below for providing information concerning number and qualifications of faculty scheduled to teach at the site or branch campus.

**For the OFFERING OF PROGRAM(S) VIA DISTANCE METHODOLOGY (ELECTRONIC OR CORRESPONDENCE) DELIVERY FOR THE FIRST TIME provide the following information:**

- Describe the infrastructure to support distance delivery methods to include the learning management system and administrative structure for electronic delivery.
- Describe how faculty members will be trained in distance delivery methodology and how courses will be developed.
- Describe technical support for students enrolled in courses delivered by distance methods and technical support for faculty members.
- Describe how effectiveness of programs offered via distance delivery will be assessed.
- Document compliance with Standard 10.6 (Distance and correspondence education).
- Follow instructions in item 4 below for providing information concerning number and qualifications of faculty scheduled to teach courses provided by distance methodology.
- Describe processes in place to ensure that students have structured access to faculty members.

**For the INITIATION OF DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAMS provide the following information:**

- Describe the degree completion program to include a description of how the degree completion program differs from the same program offered in traditional format.
- Describe how the institution ensures that student learning outcomes are the same for the program offered as a degree completion program as those for the program offered in traditional format.
- Describe assessment methods for determining achievement of student learning outcomes for the degree completion program.
- Describe admission requirements for students entering the degree completion program.
- Describe the format for offering the degree completion program (for example, compressed format, accelerated format, etc.).
- Follow instructions in item 4 below for providing information concerning number and qualifications of faculty members scheduled to teach in the degree completion program.

#### **4. FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS**

- Complete the [Faculty Roster Form](#) for faculty members scheduled to teach in the new program, in a degree completion program, at a new site or branch campus, or in programs to be offered by distance methodology for the first time. Follow directions for completing the form which requires that the institution present the qualifications of each faculty member to teach the courses assigned to them. The [form](#) and [instructions](#) may be accessed at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org) under [Institutional Resources](#) or from a link on the [Substantive Change](#) page.
- For a **new program**, the institution must demonstrate that it has at least one qualified faculty member to develop and/or teach discipline courses in the new program. Refer to Standard 6.2.a in the *Principles* concerning the determination of appropriate qualifications.
- Provide narrative with supporting evidence that the number of full-time faculty members will be adequate to support the initiative and describe the impact on faculty workload of the new program, new site, or distance delivery.

- Document scholarship and research capability of faculty members teaching in graduate programs and document faculty experience in directing student research.

## 5. LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES

- List and describe discipline-specific learning resources to support a new program. Please do not list all resources located in the library if they do not relate to the specific change.
- Document discipline-specific refereed journals and primary source materials.
- If the institution is reliant on agreements with other libraries, provide a signed copy of each formal agreement and describe how the collections support the program(s).
- Describe specifically how students enrolled in a new program and/or enrolled in a program at an off-campus location and/or enrolled in a distance education program access these discipline-specific learning resources.
- Describe how students and faculty members will access information electronically.
- Describe how faculty and students are instructed in the use of online resources as well as on site library resources.
- Describe resources to support students in access to and use of learning resources.

**Note:** If electronic databases are listed, describe the discipline-specific suites of resources and not just the name of the database or the consortium through which it is accessed (such as Viva, TexShare, Galileo, Louis, etc.).

## 6. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- Describe specific programs, services, and activities which will support students enrolled in the new program and/or enrolled at a new off-campus site and/or enrolled in distance education programs. Do not list student support services which are not relevant to the specific change.

## 7. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

- Describe the adequacy of physical facilities which will support the change.
- Describe equipment which will be available for a new program or available at a new site.
- Describe the impact that the proposed change will have on physical facilities and equipment for existing programs and services.

## 8. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Provide a business plan that includes all of the following (**NOTE: This applies to ALL submissions**)
  - (a) a description of financial resources available to support the proposed change, **including a budget** for the first year of the proposed change (**a three-year budget is required for a new branch campus**). Do not send a copy of the entire institutional budget.
  - (b) projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow for the proposed change
  - (c) the amount of resources going to institutions or organizations for contractual or support services for the proposed change
  - (d) the operational, management, and physical resources available for the change.
- Provide contingency plans in the event that required resources do not materialize.

**The institution must disclose if it is currently on reimbursement for Title IV funding.**

**Institutions currently on sanction with SACSCOC for financial reasons must provide a copy of the audit for the most recently completed fiscal year.**

**9. DESCRIPTION OF INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR THE CHANGE**

- Provide a brief description of institutional assessment processes.
- Describe how the institution will incorporate the change (program, site, distance education or other change) into the institution-wide review and assessment processes.

**10. APPENDICES**

- Appendices may be used in hard copy (print) submissions to provide documentation supporting the narrative in the prospectus.
- **NOTE: In hard copy submission tabs must be provided identifying each appendix (by name or number) referenced in the narrative.**
- Links may be provided in electronic submissions to link to documentation supporting the narrative in the prospectus. **Be sure links allow reviewers to return to the narrative.**

## **Appendix C: Institutional Contingency Teach-out Plan**

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### *For accredited institutions*

An institutional contingency teach-out plan must be approved if any of the following occur:

- a. the institution is placed on probation by SACSCOC,
- b. SACSCOC acts to end the institution's accreditation,
- c. the institution's state authorization is revoked,
- d. the institution is on provisional certification for federal financial aid by U.S. Department of Education (USDE),
- e. the institution is on reimbursement for federal financial aid by USDE, *or*
- f. the institution is the subject of emergency action by USDE.

A contingency teach-out plan is created in due diligence as precaution rather than as an imminent closure plan. Should closure become necessary, the contingency teach-out plan becomes the institutional closure plan, subject to revisions as warranted. The objective of a contingency teach-out plan is assurance of adequate institutional planning and SACSCOC concurrence for the benefit of students, faculty, and staff well in advance of immediate need. The contingency teach-out plan must detail, for each institutional program, how the institution will provide options for students to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption and additional costs, including identification of comparable programs and institutions. Teach-out agreements may be included.

### *For applicant and candidate institutions*

When an applicant receives candidacy status, it must submit an institutional contingency teach-out plan to ensure students completing the teach-out would meet curricular requirements for professional licensure or certification, if any, and which must include a list of academic programs offered by the institution and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach out agreement with the institution. If the institution does not receive initial accreditation within two years of becoming a candidate, the institution will remain a candidate upon the condition that only the currently enrolled students has had a reasonable time to complete the activities in its teach-out plan to assist students in transferring or completing their programs, but for no more than 120 days unless approved by SACSCOC Board of Trustees for Good Cause.

From the *Substantive Change Policy and Procedure* approved by the  
SACSCOC Board of Trustees, September 2020

## What to Submit

An institutional contingency teach-out plan addresses must address the numbered items below. For simplicity and to help ensure completeness, use the numbered items as a template for creating a teach-out plan; retain the item numbers and descriptions as provided. If an item is not applicable, provide a brief explanation; do not delete the item or leave it blank. The teach-out plan content is based on federal requirements.

1. Communication
  - a. Describe a communication plan to inform students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of the institution's closure. The plan
    - i. must not rely on a single medium (e.g., email only),
    - ii. must be appropriate to each stakeholder,
    - iii. must include how it will inform students how to access transcripts, other academic records (such as advising plans), financial records (such as payments due to the institution), and financial aid records (such as loan processors), and
    - iv. must explain how it will inform students of any additional costs associated with teach-out options.
2. Student academic records
  - a. Describe a plan to preserve and make available to former students all academic transcripts including validations/confirmations of academic credentials awarded to former students.
  - b. Identify the party to whom academic records will be entrusted and include a physical address and contact information.
  - c. Identify any state or other governmental agency requirement regarding disposition of academic records.
  - d. Describe a plan to inform current and former students how they may request transcript copies.
  - e. Include a description of any encumbrances placed on access to academic records such as withholding transcript copies if a former student has an outstanding balance owed *to the institution*.
3. Student accounts receivable
  - a. Describe a plan to collect outstanding balances owed *to the institution* by students and former students after the closure.
  - b. Include a description of how students and former students will be informed of the institution's intention to collect.
4. Refunds and loan discharges
  - a. Describe a plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on State refund policies.
5. Re-employment
  - a. Explain how the institution will assist faculty and staff in finding new employment.
6. Programs
  - a. Provide a list of all academic programs offered by the institution for all credentials (e.g., certificates, diplomas, degrees) and for all instructional levels (undergraduate and graduate).
  - b. The program list must include for *each* program
    - i. at least two teach-out institutions offering comparable programs where students could complete their program of study, and

- ii. for each program / teach-out institution combination,
    - 1. a statement of assurance that the method of delivery is comparable,
    - 2. a good faith assessment of the number and types of credits each teach-out institution is willing to accept prior to students' enrollment,
    - 3. a statement of assurance that the curricular requirements at the teach-out institution meet requirements for professional licensure or certification as applicable to the program,
    - 4. a statement of assurance that students are not required to move or travel substantial distances or durations with possible exceptions for highly specialized programs, and
    - 5. the institution's plan to provide a clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.
- 7. Teach-out institutions
  - a. Provide a list of all institutions identified as offering comparable programs where students could complete their programs of study to include
    - i. the name and web address of each institution,
    - ii. the institution's accreditor or accreditator(s),
    - iii. a good faith statement of assurance that the institution is in good standing with its institutional accreditator(s), the U.S. Department of Education, and is not under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.
- 8. Students
  - a. Provide a list of all enrolled students by academic program to include each student's current progress to completion
- 9. Teach-out agreements (optional at the institution's discretion)
  - a. A teach-out agreement is usually required if any significant consideration *other than* the transfer of academic credit is agreed upon between the institution and a teach-out institution. If the teach-out institution is only transferring credit and making no additional consideration for students covered under a teach-out plan, then the institutions are, in essence, executing a transfer articulation agreement and a teach-out agreement is not necessary. Teach-out agreements are subject to approval separate from the approval of the teach-out plan.

**Document History: Procedures**

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