



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
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SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

- Policy Statement –

Institutional Obligations:

1. Member institutions are required to notify the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) of changes in accordance with the substantive change policy and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of changes.
2. Member institutions are required to have a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported to the Commission in a timely fashion.

Definition: Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Under federal regulations, substantive change includes

- Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution
- Any change in legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution
- The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, either in content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated
- The addition of courses or programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or reaffirmation.
- A change from clock hours to credit hours
- A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program
- The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program.
- The establishment of a branch campus
- Closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus or institution
- Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement such as a dual degree program or a joint degree program with another institution
- Acquiring another institution or a program or location of another institution
- Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out program for a closed institution
- Entering into a contract by which an entity not eligible for Title IV funding offers 25% or more of one or more of the accredited institution's programs

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees has approved additional substantive changes that require notification and, in some cases, approval prior to implementation. This policy and its procedures address substantive changes identified through Federal regulations and Board approval.

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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

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.

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 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.

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 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.

The Policy

Commission Responsibilities

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) accredits an entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located or however they are delivered. It is responsible for reviewing all substantive changes that occur between an institution's decennial reviews to determine whether the change has affected the quality of the total institution and to assure the public that all aspects of the institution continue to meet defined standards.

The SACSCOC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an agency whose accreditation enables its member institutions to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV programs. To maintain its recognition with the U.S. Department of Education, the SACSCOC has incorporated federal requirements into its substantive change policy and procedures. Some of those requirements specify that an institution seek and receive approval prior to the initiation of a substantive change so that the change can be included in the institution's scope of accreditation.

Institutional Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of an institution to follow SACSCOC substantive change procedures and inform SACSCOC of substantive changes as specified in those procedures. If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact SACSCOC staff for consultation. SACSCOC accredits institutions, not systems. While a system may provide SACSCOC with important information regarding changes planned or underway at its institutions, **it is expected that each institution will follow the reporting requirements of the substantive change policy.**

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 **Notification and Approval Prior to Implementation**
- Procedure Two for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring **Only Notification Prior to Implementation**
- Procedure Three for Closing a Program, Site, Branch Campus or Institution.

Procedures for the following types of changes are included in a separate document, **[“Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership...”](#)**

- initiating mergers or consolidations
- acquiring any program or site from another institution
- adding as a permanent location any site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that is closing
- changes in governance, ownership, means of control or legal status

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	Prior Notification Required	Time Frame for Contacting COC	Prior Approval Required	Documentation
Initiating coursework or programs at a different level than currently approved	1	Yes	12 months	Yes	Application for Level Change Due dates: April 15 or October 1
Expanding at current degree level (<i>significant departure from current programs</i>)	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating a branch campus (See definition of "branch campus" on p. 3 of this document.)	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice					
...using existing approved courses	NA	NA	NA	NA	None
...at a new off-campus site (previously approved program)	1	Yes	Approval required prior to implementation	Yes	Modified prospectus
...that is a significant departure from previously approved programs	1	Yes	Approval required prior to implementation	Yes	Modified prospectus
Initiating other certificate programs					
... using existing approved courses	NA	NA	NA	NA	None
... at a new off-campus site (previously approved program)	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
...that is a significant departure from previously approved programs	1	Yes	6 months	yes	Prospectus
Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus

Types of Change	Procedure	Prior Notification Required	Time Frame for Contacting COC	Prior Approval Required	Documentation
Initiating joint or dual degrees with another institution: (See: "Collaborative Academic Arrangements: Policy and Procedures.") Joint programs - with another SACSCOC accredited institution - with an institution not accredited by SACSCOC Dual programs	 2 1 2	 Yes Yes Yes	 Prior to implementation 6 months Prior to implementation	 No Yes No	 Copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution Prospectus Copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution
Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School programs offered at the high school) ...Student can obtain 50 percent or more credits toward program ...Student can obtain 25-49 percent-of credit ...Student can obtain 24 percent or less	 1 2 NA	 Yes Yes NA	 6 months Prior to implementation NA	 Yes No NA	 Prospectus Letter of notification none
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites ...Adding programs that are significantly different from current programs <u>at the site</u> ...Adding programs that are NOT significantly different from current programs <u>at the site</u>	 2 NA	 Yes NA	 Prior to implementation NA	 No NA	 Letter of notification NA

Types of Change	Procedure	Prior Notification Required	Time Frame for Contacting COC	Prior Approval Required	Documentation
Altering significantly the length of a program	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating distance learning...					
...Offering 50 percent or more of a program <u>for the first time</u> (Adding subsequent programs requires advance notification only for programs that are significant departures from the originally approved programs)	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
...Offering 25-49 percent	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification
...Offering 24 percent or less	NA	NA	NA	NA	none
Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	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 25% or more of an educational program offered by the COC accredited institution	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
... if the entity provides less than 25% of an educational program offered by the accredited institution	2	yes	6 months	no	Copy of the signed agreement
Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution	See SACSCOC policy " Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership... "	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus Due dates: April 15 or October 1

Types of Change	Procedure	Prior Notification Required	Time Frame for Contacting COC	Prior Approval Required	Documentation
Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution	See SACSCOC policy " Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership... "	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus Due dates: April 15 or October 1
Relocating a main or branch campus	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographic area)	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification with new address and starting date
Changing from clock hours to credit hours	1	yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Altering significantly the length of a program	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating degree completion programs	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution - Institution to teach out its own students	3	Yes	Immediately following decision to close	Yes	Description of teach-out plan included with letter of notification
	3	Yes	Immediately following decision to close	Yes	Description of teach-out plan, copy of signed teach-out agreement detailing terms included with notification
Acquiring any program or site from another institution	See SACSCOC policy " Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership... "	yes	6 months	yes	Prospectus
Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing	See SACSCOC policy " Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership... "	yes	6 months	yes	Prospectus

Required Committee Visits

The following five types of substantive changes require on-site committee reviews within six months after implementation:

1. The initiation of an additional off-campus site/location at which a student can earn at least 50 percent 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 percent or more of the credit for at least one program.

When an institution initiates its fourth off-campus site/location where 50 percent 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 percent 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 "[Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership...](#)")
4. The initiation of mergers/consolidations. (See SACSCOC policy "[Mergers, Consolidations and Changes of Ownership...](#)")
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.)

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. The report of the Substantive Change Committee will be used by the Board of Trustees of SACSCOC to determine the ongoing accreditation of an institution.

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 **Procedures One and Two**.
3. An accredited institution in the appeals 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 and Two** 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 Core Requirements or Comprehensive Standards may lead SACSCOC to further review the institution, even if the prospectus is withdrawn or approval of the change is denied.
8. Although SACSCOC staff may approve many of the substantive changes submitted by institutions and described in this policy, staff will automatically refer to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees the following cases requiring prior approval:
 - a proposed substantive change requiring prior approval submitted by an institution currently on sanction
 - a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution recently removed from sanction with particular attention to those involving non-compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1 or Comprehensive Standard 3.10.1, both dealing with financial health
 - a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution currently on reimbursement for Title IV federal funding

- the application of an institution initiating coursework, credit certificates, or degree programs at a more advanced level than currently approved by SACSCOC, excluding the initiation of programs moving the institution from Level III to IV or from Level V to VI, which are normally reviewed by staff, and
 - the prospectus of an institution planning a merger/consolidation, change of legal status, governance, ownership or form of control. (See SACSCOC Policy [“Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership...”](#))
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, 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, 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. 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.
 15. 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.)

Fees and Expenses

1 Fees related to the review of an application/prospectus

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

\$300 For an institution seeking review of a substantive change prospectus or application for level change

\$150 Per institution for a collaborative effort between two member institutions seeking review of a single prospectus

\$100 Per institution for a collaborative effort among three or more member institutions seeking review of a single prospectus

2. Fees related to Substantive Change Committee visits

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

The actual cost of the committee
(Includes travel, lodging, food, and related expenses), and

25 percent of the total cost of the committee

PROCEDURE ONE

The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Notification and Approval Prior to Implementation

Changes Requiring Notification and Approval

Substantive changes requiring notification, 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 beyond the level of current accreditation. Examples include: an associate degree-granting college initiating bachelor's degrees or a four-year institution initiating degrees at the master's level; a graduate 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 an [Application](#) for Members Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level.

Repackaging of 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, causing it to be reclassified from Level V to Level VI, is required to request the level change in writing in order for SACSCOC to reclassify the institution within its data base.

Applications for a change from Level III to Level IV and Level V to Level VI 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 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 prior to implementation. SACSCOC will waive the six-month notification requirement and 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 program.

4. **Initiating an off-campus (additional) site (*site-based/classroom group instruction*) at which students can earn at least 50 percent 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 period of five years, at which time it 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. **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.

For degree completion programs, offering 25-49 percent of an educational program at an off-campus site does not require a full prospectus; however, the institution is required to notify the President of SACSCOC and submit a modified prospectus consisting of 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.

6. **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 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.

7. **Initiating distance learning or correspondence courses and programs by which students can earn at least 50 percent 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.

8. **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. 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.

9. **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.

10. **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 on [“Credit Hours.”](#)

11. **Changing significantly the length of a program, substantially increasing 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.

12. **Relocating a main or branch campus.** The prospectus should demonstrate that the new facilities maintain the institution's compliance with Comprehensive Standard 3.11.

13. **Initiating a collaborative academic program with another institution not accredited by SACSCOC.** The prospectus should demonstrate compliance with the SACSCOC policy [“Collaborative Academic Arrangements: Policy and Procedures”](#). Examples include joint degree or dual degree programs.

14. **Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs.** This applies if the entity provides 25 percent or more of an educational program offered by the accredited institution. The prospectus must include a copy of the signed agreement.

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 six months in advance of the intended implementation of the substantive change. The only exception to this deadline is the initiation of programs offered at a more advanced degree level. This change requires written notification twelve months before the intended implementation date.

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: After receiving notification of a proposed substantive change, the President of SACSCOC will ask the institution to submit a completed [prospectus](#) if one has not been submitted. The prospectus must be submitted at least three months in advance of the planned implementation date to allow ample time for review and approval. Prospectuses may be submitted in print form or on flash drive, CD or DVD (submit one copy).

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

After receiving notification of the intent to initiate a program at a level different from that for which it is approved, the President of SACSCOC will ask the institution to complete an [application](#) if one has not been submitted. The application must be submitted by April 15 for consideration at the June meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, or by October 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.

Staff Options

Upon receipt of a substantive change **prospectus** not automatically referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for approval, a SACSCOC staff member will review the prospectus and any supporting material submitted by the institution and will recommend to the President of SACSCOC one of the actions listed below:

1. accept the prospectus and approve the program, with or without a site visit, or
2. refer the prospectus to the Committee on Compliance and Reports (standing committee of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees) for review.

Upon receipt of an **application** for initiating coursework or programs at a level different from that for which it is approved, the application will be forwarded automatically to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review and approval at its next scheduled meeting: June or December. (See page 11, item 8 for a complete list of substantive changes automatically referred to the Board of Trustees for approval.) Exceptions are for institutions moving from Level III to Level IV, or from Level V to Level VI, which are reviewed by staff.

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

Prospectus: If the President of SACSCOC refers a prospectus to the Committee on Compliance and Reports, the Committee will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the prospectus and approve 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 percent 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. 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.

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 levels from III to IV and from V to VI which are 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 Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements, 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) 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, 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, request a monitoring report, with/without a special committee visit (mandatory visit if placed on Probation)
3. discontinue accreditation

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 percent but less than 50 percent of credits toward a program.** For degree-completion programs for which 25-49 percent of a program's credits are available at an off-campus instructional site, see Procedure One (p. 15) "Initiating off-campus site-based classroom instruction at which students can earn at least 50 percent of the credits toward the educational program."
 - b. **Adding significantly different programs if 50 percent or more of the credit for such programs may be earned at the site.** This does not apply to new sites; only applies to previously approved off-campus site.
2. For distance learning/technology-based group or individual instruction (where the instructor and student are geographically separated)
 - a. **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 percent of their credits toward an educational program.**
 - b. **Adding programs (approved for the institution) that are significantly different from previously reported programs offered through distance learning.** Once an institution has been approved to offer 50 percent or more of a program via distance learning, it need only notify SACSCOC when approved programs that are significantly different from its current distance learning repertoire are added to the array of distance learning programs. Such notification is required only if 50 percent or more of the added program is offered via distance delivery.
3. **Adding correspondence education courses or programs that are significantly different from those that were initially approved for the institution or site.**
4. **Initiating programs/courses delivered through contractual agreement or a consortium.** Clinical agreements such as for internships and articulation agreements among institutions that are members of SACSCOC need not be reported.
5. **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 address of the old site, the address of the new site and the starting date of the new site.
6. **Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides less than 25 percent of an educational program offered by the accredited institution.** A copy of the signed agreement must be provided.

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 choose one of the following options:

1. The institution teaches out currently enrolled students; no longer admits students to programs; and terminates the program, the operations of an approved instructional site or a branch campus, or the operations of an institution after students have graduated. (**Teach-out plan**)
2. The institution enters into a contract for another institution or organization to teach out the educational programs or program. (**Teach-out agreement**)

Teach-out plans and teach-out agreements must be approved in advance of implementation by SACSCOC. 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
2. An explanation of how affected parties (students, faculty, staff) will be informed of the impending closure
2. An explanation of how students will be helped to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption or additional expense
3. Signed copies of teach-out agreements with other institutions, if any
4. How faculty and staff will be redeployed or helped to find new employment
5. If closing an institution, arrangement for the storing of student records, disposition of final financial resources and other assets

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 it 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

Document history:

Revised for the Principles of Accreditation: February 2004

Revised: Commission on Colleges, December 2006

Adopted: Commission on Colleges, June 2008

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

Appendix A: Current Standards and Policies Addressing Unreported Substantive Change

1. [Principles of Accreditation](#), Comprehensive Standard 3.12.1

The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the substantive change policy and, when required, seeks approval prior to the initiation of changes.

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 CS 3.12.1 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 CS 3.12.1 out of compliance and write a recommendation. The institution will address the recommendation in its response to the Commission.

3. **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 1** of the Commission's policy entitled "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges." (See Commission web page at <http://www.sacscoc.org> under "Substantive Changes".)
- b) Commission staff will review the substantive change notification; the prospectus, if required; and any additional information that may have been requested. Following analysis, Commission staff will recommend to the SACSCOC President one of the following actions:
 1. approve the program, with or without a site visit;
 2. refer the prospectus to the Board of Trustees 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.
- c) The issue of failure to comply with Comprehensive Standard 3.12.1 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 its policy as described on page 1 of "[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 Content of the Substantive Change Prospectus

One copy of a prospectus should be submitted to the SACSCOC President on paper or on CD or DVD (please see “Guidelines for Communicating Information Electronically” for guidance on electronic media) and include all applicable information below regarding the change. **Documents will not be accepted via e-mail.** The document should include a concisely worded narrative with the information specified in this appendix. A prospectus normally does not exceed **25 pages** plus appendices. Please note that SACSCOC reserves the right to make amendments to the requirements outlined below for certain types of changes.

In lieu of a prospectus, 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 and includes an index correlating the submitted materials with the corresponding information required in a prospectus. Faculty qualifications, however, must be documented using the [faculty roster form](#). *Curriculum vitae* in lieu of a faculty roster will not be accepted.

Reminder: An institution initiating a level change must complete an [Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level](#) and submit it in quadruplicate *in lieu of completing a prospectus*.

The following guidelines are generic; **each prospectus should be tailored to focus on the specific change being proposed.**

Cover Sheet for Substantive Change Prospectus

- Include name, phone number, and e-mail address of person to be contacted with questions regarding the prospectus
- List degrees that the institution is authorized to grant. As a subset of each degree, list majors available. (*Photocopy from catalog is acceptable*)
- List certificate, diploma and degree programs which are related to the proposed program(s)
- List institutional strengths that facilitate the offering of the proposed program(s)
- List of existing approved off-campus sites and their addresses

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

Describe the proposed change; list the initial date of implementation; projected number of students, if applicable; description of primary target audience; projected life of the program (single cohort or ongoing); instructional delivery methods and, if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site, its complete physical address,

2. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Provide a clear statement of the nature and purpose of the change in the context of the institution’s mission and goals; evidence of the legal authority for the change (if authorization is required by the governing board or the state); and whether the proposed degree program or similar program is offered on the main campus or at other **approved** off-campus sites.

3. **ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND PROGRAM PLANNING/APPROVAL**

Briefly discuss the rationale for the change, including an assessment of need; evidence of inclusion of the change in the institution’s ongoing planning and evaluation processes; and

documentation that faculty and other groups were involved in the review and approval of the new site or program.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHANGE

Provide a description of the proposed change, including the specific outcomes and learning objectives of the program and a schedule of proposed course offerings. In the case of a change involving the initiation of a branch campus or an off-campus site, indicate the educational program(s) to be offered. Describe any differences in admission, curriculum, or graduation requirements for students enrolled at new site(s), or any special arrangements for grading, transcripts, or transfer policies. Describe administrative oversight to ensure the quality of the program or services to be offered. . A prospectus for approval of distance learning should describe the infrastructure supporting the delivery method (training of faculty, development of courses for distance delivery, technical support for student and faculty).

5. FACULTY

Provide a complete roster (using the [Faculty Roster form](#)) of those faculty employed to teach in the program(s) referred to in the prospectus, including a description of those faculty members' academic qualifications and other experiences relevant to the courses to be taught in the program in question, course load in the new program, and course work taught in other programs currently offered. Please consult the "[Faculty Roster Instructions](#)" for guidance in completing the Roster. Provide a narrative with supporting evidence that the number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the program; and describe the impact of the new initiative on faculty workload.

For distance learning programs, describe processes in place to ensure that students have structured access to faculty. For graduate programs, document scholarship and research capability of faculty; for doctoral programs, document faculty experience in directing student research.

6. LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Describe library and information resources—general as well as specific to the program—and staffing and services that are in place to support the initiative. If reliant upon other libraries, describe those collections and their relevance to the proposed program(s) and include a copy of formal agreements in the appendix. Relative to electronic resources, describe how students and faculty will access information, training for faculty and students in the use of online resources, and staffing and services available to students and faculty. If you are citing electronic databases accessed through consortial or statewide groups, please describe the discipline-specific suites of resources and not just the name of the consortium (such as Viva, Tex-Share, Galileo, Louis, etc.). For doctoral programs, document **discipline-specific refereed journals and primary source materials**.

7. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Provide a description of physical facilities and equipment to support this initiative. Assess the impact that the proposed change will have on existing programs and services.

8. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

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

Provide a business plan that includes **all** of the following:

- a. a description of financial resources to support the change, **including a budget** for the first year (a three-year budget is requested for a new branch campus)

- b. projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow
- c. the amount of resources going to institutions or organizations for contractual or support services
- d. the operational, management, and physical resources available for the change.

Provide contingency plans in case required resources do not materialize.

For institutions currently on sanction with SACSCOC for financial reasons, provide a copy of the most recent audit.

9. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Describe how the institution assesses overall institutional effectiveness as well as the means used to monitor and ensure the quality of the degree program(s), off-campus site(s), or other changes. Summarize procedures for systematic evaluation of instructional results, including the process for monitoring and evaluating programs at the new site, as well as using the results of evaluation to improve institutional programs, services, and operations. For compressed time frames describe the methodology for determining that levels of knowledge and competencies comparable to those required in traditional formats have been achieved.

10. APPENDICES

Appendices may include items such as copies of library and other cooperative or contractual agreements. All appendices should be referenced in the text.

*June 2009
Edited: August 18, 2011*

Appendix C:
**Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation
at a More Advanced Degree Level**