



Revised February 10, 2013 to reflect changes to SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy

Substantive Changes: SACS Notification and Approval Requirements

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is obligated by the U. S. Department of Education to review and approve significant changes, modifications, and expansions established by accredited institutions. These substantive changes must be reported to SACSCOC from the president of an accredited university. Faculty and staff assist the President in recognizing and reporting these changes.

As defined by SACSCOC, substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution and, 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 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

As indicated in the *Substantive Change For Accredited Institutions of the Commission of Colleges Policy Statement*, notification constitutes a letter from the institution's chief executive officer or his/her designated representative to the President of the Commission summarizing the 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 [Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges Policy Statement](#) and are

found on the [SACS Substantive Changes website](#). Loss of accreditation of the university's degree and certificate programs can be the result of failing to notify SACS of substantive changes (described in the table below).

As stated in the SACSCOC policy, "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."

The administrative heads of both academic and non-academic units are responsible for being attentive to what SACS considers a "significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution," and for being aware of related information resources concerning accreditation.

Substantive Changes Concerning Individual Academic Programs and Other University Entities

It is the responsibility of the head of the department in which an academic program resides to ensure that SACS requirements of notification or approval have been met prior to implementing any substantive change concerning an academic program in his/her department. The documentation required for notifying SACS of substantive changes and for requesting prior SACS approvals is to be initiated by the relevant department head, after having obtained approval to proceed by the dean of the college and the Provost. For substantive changes requiring notification only, the SACS liaison prepares the letter of notification after having received the requisite approved internal documentation regarding the change (e.g., Provost approval through the supervisory line of a request to initiate an off-campus instructional site where a student can obtain 25-49% of credit towards a degree).

For substantive changes requiring SACS approval prior to implementation, the requisite SACS documentation is typically prepared by the department head and is then submitted for review and consideration for approval through the supervisory line to the SACS liaison and then to the Provost (Director/Department Head > Dean > SACS liaison > Provost). The SACS liaison and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs are available to work with the Dean and Department Head during the preparation of the documentation.

Some substantive changes are more global to the university environment. For any of these substantive changes, the initiation and preparation of the documentation as well as the requisite internal approval process will be determined on a case-by-case basis in accordance with relevant University of Louisiana System and Board of Regents policies or rules.

Communication with SACSCOC personnel regarding substantive change notifications or requests for approvals is done by the President, Provost, SACS Liaison, or one of their designees. Only the President or his designee (typically the SACS Liaison or Provost) may submit to SACSCOC substantive change notifications and requests for substantive change approvals.

SACS has three procedures for addressing the different types of substantive changes. Greater detail for each procedure is found in the [Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges Policy Statement](#), pp 14-22:

- **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 SACS separate document, — [Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership ...](#):

- initiating mergers
- 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

Reporting Various Types of Substantive Change (pp 6-9 in [SACSCOC SC Policy](#))

The different types of substantive change, specific procedure to be used for each, the respective notification requirements, and the 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 | NA | NA | Yes | Application for Level Change Due dates: April 15 or September 15 |
| Expanding at current degree level (<i>significant departure from current programs</i>) | 1 | Yes | 6 months | Yes | Prospectus |
| Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| ...using existing approved courses | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Modified Prospectus |
| ...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 | | | | | |

| Types of Change | Procedure | Prior Notification Required | Time Frame for Contacting COC | Prior Approval Required | Documentation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initiating other certificate Programs | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| ... using existing approved courses | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| ... at a new off-campus site (previously approved program) | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Prospectus |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| ...that is a significant departure from previously approved programs | 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Prospectus |
| Initiating joint or dual degrees with another institution: (See Agreements Involving Joint & Dual Academic Awards) | | | | | |
| Joint programs | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | NA | Copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution |
| - with another SACSCOC accredited institution | 1 | Yes | 6 months | Yes | Prospectus |
| - with an institution not accredited by SACSCOC | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | No | Copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution |
| Dual programs | | | | | |
| Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School & Dual programs offered at the high school) | | | | | |
| Student can obtain 50 % or more credits toward program | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Prospectus |
| Student can obtain 25-49 % of credits toward program | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | No | Letter of notification |
| Students can obtain 24% or less of a program | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |

| Types of Change | Procedure | Prior Notification Required | Time Frame for Contacting COC | Prior Approval Required | Documentation |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites ...Adding programs that are significantly different from current programs at the site ...Adding programs that are NOT significantly different from current programs at the site | NA <hr/> NA | NA <hr/> NA | NA <hr/> NA | NA <hr/> NA | NA <hr/> NA |
| Altering significantly the length of a program | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Prospectus |
| Initiating distance learning... | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Prospectus |
| Offering 50 % or more of a program for the first time | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | No | Letter of notification |
| Offering 25-49 % | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Offering 24% or less | | | | | |
| Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | NA | Letter of notification and copy of signed agreement |
| 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 |
| 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 | NA | NA | | Prospectus |
| ... if the entity provides less than 25% of the educational program offered by the accredited institution | 2 | Yes | Prior to implementation | | Copy of the signed agreement |

| Types of Change | Procedure | Prior Notification Required | Time Frame for Contacting COC | Prior Approval Required | Documentation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution | See SACSCOC policy “Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership: Review and Approval.” | Yes | 6 months | Yes | Prospectus Due dates: April 15 or September 15 |
| Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution | See SACSCOC policy “Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership: Review and Approval.” | Yes | 6 months | Yes | Prospectus Due dates: April 15 or September 15 |
| 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 | NA | Letter of notification with new address and starting date |
| Changing from clock hours to credit hours | 1 | NA | NA | NA | Justify reasons for change, indicate calculation of equivalency, and other pertinent information |
| Altering significantly the length of a program | 1 | NA | NA | Yes | Prospectus |
| Initiating degree completion programs | 1 | NA | NA | 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 |
| ...Institution contracts with another institution to teach-out students (Teach-out Agreement) | 3 | Yes | Immediately following decision to close | Yes | Description of teach-out plan, copy of signed teach out agreement detailing terms included with notification |

| Types of Change | Procedure | Prior Notification Required | Time Frame for Contacting COC | Prior Approval Required | Documentation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Acquiring any program or site from another institution | See SACSCOC policy "Mergers, Consolidations and Change of Ownership: Review and Approval" | 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: Review and Approval." | Yes | 6 months | Yes | Prospectus |

Additional Revisions to SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy Effective January, 2013

Substantive Changes requiring letters of notification prior to implementation:

- Initiating an off-campus site at which a student may earn at least 25% but less than 50% of credits toward a program (*please be sure to include the street address and starting date*).
- Moving an approved off-campus instructional site within the same geographic area to serve essentially the same pool of students (include the address of the old site, the address of the new site, and the starting date of the new site)
- 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
- Initiating programs/courses delivered through contractual agreement or a consortium (provision *does not apply* to articulation agreements with other institutions, clinical agreements, or internship agreements)
- 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 (copy of the signed agreement must be provided)
- 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.
- Initiating a merger/consolidation, change of governance/means of control

Substantive Changes NOT requiring letters of notification and not requiring Commission approval:

- Adding approved programs (significantly different or not) to an approved off-campus site
- Adding approved programs to the institution's electronically delivered offerings
- Adding approved correspondence courses/programs that are different from those initially approved for delivery via correspondence.
- Initiating articulation agreements with other institutions, clinical agreements, or internship agreements
- Initiating degree completion programs offering 25%-49% of an educational program at an off-campus site

Submit only the prospectus/application with a cover letter (Do NOT send letters of notification in advance) indicating the nature of the following:

- Submitting an application for level change
- Submitting a prospectus for approval of an off-campus site to offer 50% or more of a program
- Submitting a prospectus to offer, **for the first time**, 50% or more of a program via distance delivery.