Substantive Changes: SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC Accredited Institutions 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 SACSCOC Policy Statement* and are found on the SACSCOC Substantive Changes website. Loss of accreditation of the university’s degree and certificate programs can be the result of failing to notify SACSCOC of substantive changes (described in the table below).

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, determining whether the changes have affected the quality of the total institution, and assuring the public that all aspects of the institution continue to meet defined standards. 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, 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.

The administrative heads of both academic and non-academic units are responsible for being attentive to what SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC of substantive changes and for requesting prior SACSCOC 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 SACSCOC liaison prepares the letter of notification after having received the requisite approved internal documentation regarding the change.

For substantive changes requiring SACSCOC approval prior to implementation, the requisite SACSCOC documentation is typically prepared by the department head and is then submitted for review and consideration for approval through the supervisory line to the SACSCOC liaison and then to the Provost (Director/Department Head >Dean > SACSCOC Liaison >Provost). The SACSCOC Liaison is 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, SACSCOC Liaison, or one of their designees. Only the President or his designee (typically the SACSCOC Liaison or Provost) may submit to SACSCOC substantive change notifications and requests for substantive change approvals.

SACSCOC has three procedures for addressing the different types of substantive changes. Greater detail for each procedure is found in the Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions Policy Statement.

- **Procedure One** for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring 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.

**Reporting Various Types of Substantive Change** (Substantive Change For SACSCOC Accredited Institutions Policy Statement)

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Change</th>
<th>Procedure or Policy</th>
<th>Prior Notification Required</th>
<th>Prior Approval Required</th>
<th>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiating coursework or programs at a different level than currently approved</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Application for Level Change</td>
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<td>Due dates:</td>
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<td>March 15 (for June review)</td>
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<td>September 1 (for December review)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating off-campus sites where student can obtain 50% or more credits toward</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Cover Sheet</td>
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<tr>
<td>a program (including but not limited to Early College High School, dual</td>
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<td>Prospectus</td>
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<tr>
<td>enrollment programs offered at a high school, and certificate programs that are</td>
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<td>(See Appendix B of this document)</td>
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<td>not at employer's request and not on short notice)</td>
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<td>Due dates:</td>
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<td>January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation</td>
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<td>July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding at current degree level (significant departure from current programs).</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites by adding</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>programs that ARE significantly different from current programs at the site</td>
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<td>AND at the institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating degree completion programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating a branch campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>(See definition of &quot;branch campus&quot; on p. 3 of this document.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating distance learning by offering 50% or more of the first program for</td>
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<td>the first time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relocating a main or branch campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title IV programs if the entity provides 25% or more of an educational program</td>
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<td>offered by the SACSCOC accredited institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Types of Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>See SACSCOC policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Cover Sheet Prospectus (See Appendix B of this document)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating dual or joint degree with at least one institution not accredited by SACSCOC</td>
<td>See SACSCOC policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards”</td>
<td>At least 6 months prior to implementation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution, and additional details on non-SACSCOC institution(s). See Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating a direct assessment competency-based program</td>
<td>See SACSCOC Policy “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs”</td>
<td>Yes – Screening Form</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Submit “Screening Form” with letter of notification. If Prospectus is required, Due dates: March 15 (for June review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution</td>
<td>See SACSCOC Policy: “Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status”</td>
<td>Yes: December 15 (for June review); June 1 (for December review)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Cover Sheet Institutional Summary Form Prospectus (See Appendix in SACSCOC Policy: “Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating a certificate program at a new off-campus site at employer’s request and on short notice (previously approved program)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating a certificate program that is a significant departure from previously approved programs at employer’s request and on short notice</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Cover Sheet Modified prospectus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding a site under a U.S. military contract for a previously approved program</td>
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<td>Contact Commission Staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Altering significantly the length of a program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing from clock hours to credit hours</td>
<td>Procedure 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Justify reasons for change, indicate calculation of equivalency, and other pertinent information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographic area)</td>
<td>Procedure 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Letter of notification with old address, new address, and implementation date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating dual or joint degrees with other SACSCOC accredited institution(s)</td>
<td>See SACSCOC Policy</td>
<td>At least 6 months prior to implementation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution. See Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium</td>
<td>Procedure 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Letter of notification and copy of signed agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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)</td>
<td>Procedure 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Letter of notification including street address and implementation date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating distance learning by offering 25-49 of the first program for the first time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution where the institution plans to teach out its own students</td>
<td>Procedure 3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Description of teach-out plan included with letter of notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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)</td>
<td>Procedure 3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Description of teach-out plan, copy of signed teach-out agreement(s) detailing terms included with notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Procedure or Policy</td>
<td>Prior Notification Required</td>
<td>Prior Approval Required</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating a certificate program at employer’s request and on short notice using existing approved courses and location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating certificate program (not at employer’s request and not on short notice) using existing approved courses and location</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites by adding approved programs that ARE NOT significantly different from current programs at the site</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating distance learning by offering 24% or less of any program for the first time</td>
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</table>

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.