

DSCC Substantive Change Policy

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to comply with the substantive change procedures of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (“SACSCOC” or “Commission”).

II. Scope

The College is accredited by the SACSCOC. The accreditation provides public documentation of institutional quality and enables the College to seek eligibility to participate in federal programs. In addition to five-year and ten-year reviews by the Commission, the College is required to follow substantive change procedures established by SACSCOC which include notification or approval by the SACSCOC prior to initiating a substantive change. “Substantive Change” means a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution as defined by SACSCOC. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs.

An unreported substantive change may require a review of the institution’s substantive change policy and procedures document by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Non-compliance subjects the institution to monitoring, sanction, or removal from membership. Failure to secure approval, if required, of a substantive change involving programs or locations that qualify for Title IV federal funding may place the institution in jeopardy with the U.S. Department of Education, including reimbursement of funds received related to an unreported substantive change.

Substantive changes include but are not limited to:

- Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.
- Any change in legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution
- Changing the governance of an institution.
- Merging/consolidating two or more institutions or entities.
- Acquiring another institution or any program or location of another institution.
- Relocating an institution or an off-campus instructional site of an institution (including a branch campus).
- Offering courses or programs (i.e., credentials) at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.
- Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non-time-based methods or measures.
- 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. (Example: Offering the Associate of Applied Science degree in Culinary Arts would be a significant departure from content currently offered and would require submittal of a substantive change prospectus.)
- Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.
- Adding an additional method of delivery to a currently offered program.
- Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement.

- Entering into a written arrangement under 34 C.F.R. § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs. An agreement offering more than 50% of one or more of an institution's programs is prohibited by federal regulation.
- A substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of one or more programs.
- The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an education program. (Example: Offering 9 or more credit hours of an 18-hour certificate program at a dual enrollment high school that is not an approved SACSCOC off-campus instructional site.)
- Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement that includes only the initiation of a dual or joint academic program with another institution
- Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out program for a closed institution.
- Adding competency-based education programs.
- Adding each competency-based education program by direct assessment.
- Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.
- Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.
- Closing an institution, a program, a method of delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.
- Participating in the federal Prison Education Program providing Pell Grant access to confined or incarcerated students.

Certain substantive changes require prior notification to SACSCOC. Other substantive changes require submission of a substantive change prospectus prior to the implementation of the substantive change. Many substantive changes require on-site committee reviews by SACSCOC. In consultation with the SACSCOC policies and staff, the College's Accreditation Liaison determines the applicability of SACSCOC Substantive Change policy to the above-described activities.

III. Policy

The College is dedicated to the expansion of academic opportunities through the development and offering of programs and courses offered off-site or by electronic means in support of the College's mission. The College's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will be consulted prior to beginning a process that results in a substantive change. Accordingly, the College's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is responsible for reporting any substantive changes to the Commission.

PROCEDURE

To ensure compliance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy, the DSCC Substantive Change Committee meets prior to the release of each academic term's schedule of classes to review instructional site locations and the percentage of programs being taught at each. The College's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison serves as the Chair of the Substantive Change Committee.

All submissions must be reported to SACSCOC promptly and coordinated through the College's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison.

All questions about whether a change is substantive should be directed to the College's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison for guidance.

IV. Compliance

The policy applies to all employees of the institution.

V. Definitions

1. Substantive Change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution.
2. Notification is a letter from an institution's chief executive officer, or the accreditation liaison to SACSCOC, 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.
3. Prospectus is submitted for larger-scale changes, such as adding significantly different programs to the academic curriculum or offering a majority of coursework that must be completed online.
4. SACSCOC is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDOE).
5. A "program" is defined by SACSCOC as a coherent course of study leading to a for-credit credential, including a degree, diploma, certificate, or other generally recognized credential.

VI. Revision History

Policy approved by Administrative Council on 02/27/2015.

Policy revised and approved by Administrative Council on 02/29/2024.

Policy revised and approved by Administrative Council on 03/26/2026.