

NUMBER: ACAF 2.11 (NEW)  
SECTION: Academic Affairs  
SUBJECT: Substantive Change  
DATE: March 30, 2015  
Policy for: All Campuses  
Procedure for: Columbia and Palmetto College Campuses  
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Issued by: Provost's Office

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## I. Policy

The University of South Carolina recognizes the importance of compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' *Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges Policy Statement* (SACSCOC, 2011), which requires accredited campuses to report all substantive changes accurately and in a timely manner to the Commission on Colleges. The purpose of this policy is to describe the process and procedures to be utilized to ensure that the University complies with this Commission on Colleges policy.

### A. Definition of Substantive Change

Substantive change as defined by the Commission on Colleges is "a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution." (Source A).

1. Examples of substantive changes that might be proposed by an institution include:
  - a. Initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level than currently approved;
  - b. Initiating a branch campus;
  - c. Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution;
  - d. Initiating a merger or consolidation with another institution;
  - e. Relocating a main or branch campus;
  - f. Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution;
  - g. Changing from clock hours to credit hours;
  - h. Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing; and
  - i. Closing a branch campus or an institution.
2. Other examples of substantive changes that might typically originate with proposals from department or academic program leadership include:

- a. Expanding program offerings at current degree level;
- b. Initiating joint degrees with another institution;
- c. Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice;
- d. Initiating other certificate programs;
- e. Initiating off-campus sites;
- f. Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites;
- g. Relocating an off-campus instructional site;
- h. Initiating online programs or other programs where the faculty and students are not in the same location that are significantly different from current online offerings;
- i. Initiating degree completion programs;
- j. Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium;
- k. Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs;
- l. Acquiring any program or site from another institution;
- m. Altering the length of a program significantly; and
- n. Closing a program or approved off-campus site.

The initiation of new off-campus sites and the addition of new site-based programs that represent significant departures from current offerings are commonly reported substantive changes. A "significant departure" is one in which the proposed new program has no closely related counterpart among the previously approved programs in the curriculum offered at a site, whether the location is the main campus or an off-campus location. To determine whether a new program is a "significant departure," the Commission on Colleges considers whether the new program requires significant amounts of additional faculty, courses, library or other learning resources, equipment or facilities, or financial resources.

**B. Substantive Change: Oversight**

1. No substantive change can be implemented or advertised until a letter of approval or an acceptance of notification is received from the Commission on Colleges.
2. The University has an obligation to notify SACSCOC when substantive changes are proposed, and some changes require that body's prior approval. To that end, the proposers of changes approved for further development must keep the Provost, Dean, Office of Academic Programs, and the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison apprised regarding the continuing viability and progress toward implementation of the potential change, so that timely notification of SACSCOC can be given.

C. Sanctions

If the University of South Carolina fails to follow SACSCOC procedures for notification and approval of substantive changes, its total accreditation may be placed in jeopardy. For that reason, the sanction for failure to follow this University policy must be sufficient to avoid such failure. If an academic program, unit or officer initiates a substantive change without following the procedures outlined in this policy, the President or Provost may direct the immediate cancellation or cessation of that change, with due regard for the educational welfare of students, when it is discovered. In areas outside of Academic Affairs, the President or relevant Vice President/Executive Director may apply the same sanction.

D. Exclusions

No exclusions from this University policy will be permitted.

E. Interpretation

Questions about the interpretation of this policy should be directed to the University's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison, who in doubtful or unprecedented cases will consult with the appropriate University official and the institution's assigned SACSCOC Vice President before rendering an opinion.

II. Procedures

Detailed procedures regarding all academic program planning and revision processes are found in the Appendices to University Policy ACAF 2.00 [Creation and Revision of Academic Programs](#). Academic units follow the procedures within the Appendices to obtain faculty governance approval for substantive changes.

- A. The Office of Academic Programs monitors the various stages of academic program processes, and meets every other month with the Academic Program Liaison Committee to discuss issues regarding academic programs, to identify upcoming challenges, and to find solutions to potential substantive change problems.
- B. If it is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, the University SACS Accreditation Liaison consults with SACSCOC staff.
- C. The University Registrar will record substantive program changes upon receiving the official South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) and SACSCOC approval letters.

## E. Reporting

These specific procedures, including the time frame for contacting the Commission on Colleges and the type of documentation required for each, are included in a comprehensive table within the Commission's policy statement (see Source A).

1. Procedure One: SACSCOC procedure associated with a substantive change that requires SACSCOC notification and approval prior to implementation. Changes under Procedure One require notification, a prospectus or application, and may involve an on-site visit.
2. Procedure Two: SACSCOC procedure associated with a substantive change that requires SACSCOC notification prior to implementation.
3. Procedure Three: SACSCOC procedure for closing a program, site, branch campus or institution.
4. A separate set of procedures is available for the following changes (see Source B):
  - a. Initiating mergers or consolidation
  - b. Acquiring any program or site from another institution; or
  - c. Adding as a permanent location any site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that is closing; and changes in governance, ownership, means of control or legal status.

## F. Responsibility for Policy

Responsibility for enforcement of this policy resides with the President. Each Dean is responsible for ensuring unit adherence to the procedures set forth in the policies governing academic programs. The Provost is responsible for ensuring that they do. The Executive Director of Institutional Research and Assessment serves as the liaison to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges with responsibility to report substantive changes in a timely manner.

### SOURCES:

- A. SACSCOC Policy Statement "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges" (<http://www.sacscoc.org/policies.asp>)
- B. SACSCOC Policy Statement "Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" (<http://www.sacscoc.org/policies.asp>)