

14.2 The institution has a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported in accordance with SACSCOC policy.

(Substantive change)

Rationale and Notes

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. The reporting and review of substantive changes ensure that the scope of programs offered by the institution, as well as the structure and organization of the institution, have undergone appropriate review by SACSCOC.

The *Principles of Accreditation* states:

The Commission on Colleges accredits the entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located and however they are delivered. Accreditation, specific to an institution, is based on conditions existing at the time of the most recent evaluation and is not transferable. When an accredited institution significantly modifies or expands its scope, or changes the nature of its affiliation or its ownership, a substantive change review is required.

A member institution is responsible for following the substantive change policy (and related policies) by informing SACSCOC of changes in accord with the stated procedures and, when required, seeking approval **prior** to initiating the change. A failure to report substantive changes properly means that SACSCOC has based its accreditation of an institution on an incorrect impression of the institution's programs, character, or structure; furthermore, SACSCOC would have, in turn, unintentionally misrepresented the institution's character and structure to other constituencies, including the U.S. Department of Education. If an institution fails to follow SACSCOC substantive change policies and procedures, it may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money it has received for programs related to the unreported substantive change. In addition, the institution's case may be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for the imposition of a sanction or for removal from membership. Thus it is important that the institution itself has policies and procedures that ensure correct and timely reporting of all substantive changes.

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 percent or more of one or more of the accredited institution's programs.

But the list of types of substantive changes itself changes if federal regulations change. A recent example has been the addition of offering direct assessment competency-based programs. Furthermore, SACSCOC reporting requirements are more specific than the above list. An institution should always check the Commission's policy [Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions](#) for the most updated information.

An appropriate institutional policy regarding substantive change should cover all different types of changes, ranging from adding a new program that may be significantly different from existing programs, to merging with another institution or closure of the institution. Policies that do not cover the full range of possible substantive changes will fall short when the unexpected happens. The policy should be approved through appropriate channels. It should also be published such that affected constituencies can obtain the policy. As important as a published policy, however, is one that is workable and working. Evidence of unreported substantive change would be considered as a strong indication that a policy is not working.

NOTE

This standard explicitly requires an institutional policy and procedure concerning substantive change. Thus, in reporting on this standard, the institution should provide evidence that the policy was approved through appropriate channels, is published so that those affected by the policy have access to it, and that the policy is implemented and enforced by the institution. While any institution with curricular changes would seem to have evidence of "implementation" within that process, if, in fact, the policy has never had reason to be implemented, then that should be clear in materials submitted to SACSCOC.

Questions to Consider

- Does the institution have an internal policy (and appropriate procedures) for notification and approval of substantive changes that:

- Covers all types of potential substantive changes?
- Has been approved through appropriate channels?
- Is published where those affected can view the policy?
- Clearly designates responsibility for substantive change reporting?
- Shows the policy is in effect?
- Has a means for updating when needed?
- Are the appropriate people at the institution involved in this policy and procedure so that relevant changes do not go unreported?

Sample Documentation

- Copies of institutional policies and procedures for reporting substantive changes, and details on how the policies and procedures are published.
- Evidence the policy has appropriate approval and is in effect.
- Copies of correspondence from SACSCOC documenting submission of materials for notification or approval of substantive change.
- Examples of internal documents showing the policy is working (e.g., completed program approval forms, curriculum committee minutes).

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC policies: [Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions](#)
 [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#)
 [Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs](#)
 [Integrity and Institutional Obligations to SACSCOC](#)
 [Mergers, Consolidations, Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change
of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#)
 [Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution](#)

This standard requires a policy or procedure; see Appendix A of this document for implications.
 See also:

SACSCOC good practices:
 [Developing Policy and Procedures Documents](#)
 [Closing a Program, Site, Branch or Institution](#)

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

CR 1.1 (*Integrity*)

- Standard 10.1 (*Academic policies*)
Standard 10.9 (*Cooperative academic arrangements*)
Standard 14.5 (*Policy compliance*)

14.3 **The institution applies all appropriate standards and policies to its distance learning programs, branch campuses, and off-campus instructional sites.**
(*Comprehensive institutional reviews*)

Rationale and Notes

The *Principles* apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered. This includes programs offered through distance and correspondence education, off-campus sites, and branch campuses. The institution must have incorporated an assessment of its compliance with appropriate standards for these circumstances. In this standard, the institution should summarize its process for incorporating the review and analysis of these programs.

Appendix C of this document offers “Guidelines for Addressing Distance and Correspondence Education, Off-Campus Instructional Sites, and Branch Campuses.” This resource will be beneficial for understanding the standards where distance education—as well as off-campus sites—deserve explicit mention within standards throughout a Compliance Certification or Fifth-Year Interim Report.

NOTE

It is not necessary to repeat each narrative containing reference to distance and correspondence education, off-campus sites, and branch campuses. However, hyperlinks back to standards containing explicit information relating to these programs would be appropriate. Standard 14.3 would be in noncompliance if there were a clear lack of inclusion of these modes of delivery or locations. However, if there were an issue with a standard or two, those standards would be found in noncompliance due to these exclusions (or evidence of noncompliance), and Standard 14.3 would be in compliance. If an institution has no distance or correspondence education, no off-campus instructional sites, and no branch campuses, “not applicable” is an appropriate response. The [Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews](#) should be consistent with the information provided in this standard regarding the presence of these modes or location of delivery.

Questions to Consider

- Are courses and programs offered at off-campus sites and through distance or correspondence education given the same attention in terms of the quality and integrity of the offerings as is given to other courses and programs?
- What types of academic and student support services and activities are offered to distance learning students, students at off-campus sites, and at branch campuses?