

- If the institution offers distance education programs or courses, how does it determine whether it has appropriate state authorization for out-of-state students?
- If the institution offers degrees internationally, what is the evidence of authorization by each country?
- Is the institution required to report changes in program offerings to the agencies? If so, when was the last report filed?

### Sample Documentation

- Copies of the official charter enabling legislation, or other legal document granting the institution degree-granting authority.
- Official documentation of what authority is needed in the state (e.g., wording of a statute delegating power to the secretary of state or to a higher education governing board).
- Additional information establishing the extent of the degree-granting authority, including any conditions attached.
- Additional information establishing operating authority for out-of-state sites, out-of-state distance education students, and international sites.

### Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

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

None noted.

- 3.1.b** An institution seeking to gain or maintain accredited status offers all coursework required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. (For exceptions, see SACSCOC policy [Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternative Approach](#).) (*Coursework for degrees*) [CR]

### Rationale and Notes

Because SACSCOC accredits only degree-granting institutions, the general expectation is that the institution has the capability to offer the range of coursework necessary for a student to earn the degree. Of course, this does not preclude an institution from having partnerships and consortial agreements, accepting coursework for transfer of credit, and the like. But for at least one degree program at each degree level at which the institution offers degrees (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, and/or doctoral), the expectation is that a student could earn the degree by coursework offered solely by the accredited institution. The rationale for this standard is that this

level of program involvement is needed to ensure quality of the institution's educational programs, to maintain the integrity of each level of degrees offered, and to fulfill the institution's mission as a degree-granting higher education provider.

There are circumstances whereby SACSCOC will allow exceptions to this standard. However, when part of the instruction is provided by another institution, or through some other means (e.g., experiential education), the institution must demonstrate that it maintains appropriate control over the quality of such programs, and the alternative approach must be approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

The rationale for an alternative approach is that if the institution makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia, or uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the institution may still be capable of demonstrating that it controls all aspects of its educational program. In accord with Commission policy "Standard 3.1.b: Documenting an Alternative Approach," an institution may choose to offer a degree program at a level at which it does not provide instruction for all coursework for at least one degree program. For example, a health science center generally can document that it meets this standard for its master's and doctoral degrees. However, the institution may wish to offer a bachelor of science in nursing, but it does not offer any general education coursework on its own. Instead, it may choose to enter into a consortium or contractual arrangement or use another alternative approach by which it accepts from other sources the appropriate general education coursework required for the degree.

In order to gain approval from the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for such arrangements, the institution describes the arrangement and demonstrates that, although it does not offer all coursework for the program or programs at a particular degree level, it assumes responsibility for and maintains control of all aspects of the degree program or programs. It is important that the institution assesses the competencies of students relative to the coursework accepted from another source and ensures that the learning outcomes are consistent with expected outcomes had the institution offered the coursework. The responsibility for the integrity of programs or coursework accepted through an alternative means rests with the institution awarding the degree.

#### **NOTE**

*Institutions already holding SACSCOC accreditation with an approved alternative approach for this standard do not need to address this standard unless the underlying conditions have changed. However, if the previously approved alternative approach is directly relevant to a different standard, that standard's narrative should include an explanation of how the alternative approach ensures compliance. For example, if an institution offers baccalaureate degrees but has an approved alternative approach whereby it does not itself offer any general education courses (e.g., a health science center), the institution would be expected to document its compliance for Standards 9.3 (General education requirements) and 8.2.c (Student outcomes: general education). It does not, however, need to re-seek approval for an alternative approach.*

## Questions to Consider

- Does the institution provide instruction for all coursework required for at least one degree program offered at each level at which it awards degrees?
- If yes, what evidence exists that it provides all instruction?
- If no, what alternative arrangement or consortium or contract does the institution have for provision of coursework which it does not offer?
  - How does the institution maintain responsibility and control of the coursework (content and learning outcomes) accepted through an alternative means or through a consortium or contract?
  - What evidence is there that such arrangements are evaluated regularly?
  - Has SACSCOC approved the consortium or contract, if necessary?

## Sample Documentation

- For those degree levels where all the coursework for at least one degree program is offered by the institution:
  - Catalog listing of degree requirements or advising checklist for a program at each level.
  - Evidence the courses are offered (e.g., class schedules showing classes were offered, or a redacted transcript for a student who completed 100% of requirements without any transfer or other alternative credits).
- For those degree levels where an alternative approach is necessary:
  - Copies of any consortium agreement or contract for such arrangements.
  - Explanation and evidence of how the institution maintains responsibility for and control over the quality of courses accepted, utilizing the policy on [Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternative Approach](#).” Such evidence might include committee minutes, reports, and assessment instruments demonstrating that the institution has developed, implemented, and evaluated the means by which it ensures appropriate control over all aspects of the programs and services provided through such arrangements, agreements, and/or contracts.

## Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

SACSCOC Policies:      [Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternative Approach](#)  
[Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions](#) [pertaining to  
consortia and contracts]  
[Quality and Integrity of Undergraduate Degrees](#)

Appendix B of this *Manual* has a definition for “degree level.”