

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION ACAF Academic Affairs		POLICY NUMBER ACAF 2.00
POLICY TITLE Creation and Revision of Academic Programs		
SCOPE OF POLICY USC System	DATE OF REVISION February 24, 2025	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Office of the Provost	

PURPOSE

University of South Carolina programs that lead to awarding of academic degrees and certificates must be reviewed and approved at appropriate levels within the university, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). This policy applies to program development and revision on all campuses.

DEFINITIONS

Academic Administrative Units: Academic administrative units at the university include colleges, schools, departments, interdisciplinary or interprofessional programs, centers, and institutes. With the exception of centers and institutes, academic administrative units may offer academic programs that lead to formal degrees. For more information, see University Policy [ACAF 2.02 Establishment and Modification of Academic Administrative Units](#).

Academic Certificates

- **Undergraduate Certificate:** Requires a minimum of 12 credit hours beyond high school.
- **Graduate Certificate:** Requires a minimum of 12 graduate credit hours, either post- baccalaureate or post-master’s. Post-baccalaureate certificates require a bachelor’s degree for admission, and post-master’s certificates require a master’s degree for admission.

Academic Program: A major-degree combination.

Academic Program Learning Outcomes: Statements that describe, in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities that students are expected to demonstrate, and that clearly support the mission of the educational program.

Academic Program Liaison (APL): Designated for each college/school on the Columbia campus, for each Comprehensive University, and for Palmetto College. The APLs serve as the primary information resource on academic program actions and as the academic program liaison to the Provost’s Office for their respective units. They also ensure that academic course and program proposals adhere to university policies. The list of current Academic Program Liaisons can be found on the Office of Academic Program Planning and

Decision Support Planning and Decision Support's [website](#).

Commission on Higher Education (CHE): The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education was established in 1967 and serves as the coordinating board for South Carolina's 33 public institutions of higher learning. In addition to partnering with institutions to deliver an effective statewide higher education system, the CHE acts both as an oversight entity on behalf of the General Assembly, and an advocate for the citizens of South Carolina as they seek opportunities to improve their lives, and those of their families, through higher education. Academic Program actions are reviewed by CHE's:

- Advisory Committee on Academic Programs (ACAP)
- Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing (CAAL)

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP): The University uses the federal taxonomy of disciplines and assigns a six-digit code for each major/program. In the taxonomy, a CIP code is specific to a particular category of the instructional program. Most graduate and undergraduate degree programs any department offers fall under the same CIP code.

Combination Degree: A combination degree is a situation where the same institution awards more than one degree from an overlapping course of study. Combination degrees often allow a shorter time for completion due to the "double-counting" of some coursework. Where this occurs, institutions are obligated to explain how each degree's quality and integrity is maintained. See Core Requirement 9.2 (Program length) in the [Resource Manual](#) for more detail.

Degree: a formal award presented to students upon successful completion of a course of study in higher education, normally at a college or university.

- **Associate's Degree:** Requires a minimum of 60 credit hours beyond high school. May only be earned at the regional Palmetto Colleges.
- **Bachelor's Degree:** Requires a minimum of 120 credit hours beyond high school. May only be awarded by four-year campuses.
- **Master's Degree:** Requires a minimum of 30 graduate credit hours beyond the bachelor's degree.
- **Specialist Degree:** Requires a minimum of 30 graduate credit hours beyond the master's degree.
- **Doctoral Degree:** Requires a minimum of 60 graduate credit hours beyond the baccalaureate degree or a minimum of 30 graduate hours beyond the master's degree; at least one letter-grade course to generate a cumulative graduate grade point average; and, for degrees culminating in a dissertation, 12-30 hours of dissertation preparation (899).

- **First Professional Degree in Law, Medicine, or Pharmacy:** Typically requires three or four years beyond the bachelor's degree or beyond pre-professional coursework.

Delivery Location: Academic programs are also identified and approved based upon the delivery location(s) or site used to offer the total number of required credit hours. Distributed learning and blended delivery methods of instruction are considered on-campus unless the traditional instructional component is classified as an off-campus or blended delivery location.

- **On-campus:** Programs offered on the geographic site of the home campus. A program is identified as “on-campus” if 50 percent or more of the program’s credits can be obtained on the home campus.
- **Off-campus:** Programs or parts of programs offered at SACSCOC approved locations geographically apart from the home campus.
- **Blended Location of Instruction:** Program may be considered “blended” if more than one delivery location is used.

Delivery Method: Academic programs may be identified according to the delivery method(s) used in most program courses.

- **Traditional Instruction:** Programs in which the majority of courses are offered in a traditional classroom setting, in which the instructor is face-to-face in the same room at the same time as the students.
- **Online Instruction:** Programs in which the majority of courses are offered using 100% web-based instruction, live video streaming instruction, and/or other online instruction as a primary delivery method.
- **Blended Method of Instruction:** Programs may be considered “blended” if more than one delivery method is used (e.g., a combination of traditional and online instruction).

Dual Degree: A dual degree (or a dual academic award) is one whereby students study at two or more institutions, and each institution awards a separate program completion credential bearing only its own name, seal, and signature. (See SACSCOC policy [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#).)

Interdisciplinary or Interprofessional Academic Programs: academic programs that bring faculty and students together from various departments, schools, and/or colleges for the purpose of scholarly focus on a given subject or subjects.

Joint Degree: A joint degree program (or joint academic award) is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and are awarded a single program completion credential bearing the

names, seals, and signatures of each participating institution. (See SACSCOC policy [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards.](#))

Other Collaborative Degree: Program governed by specific agreements typically involving an articulated transfer of credit from one institution to another for the award of a single or multiple degrees. Such programs may also include bridge programs that require non-credit study prior to coursework for academic credit.

Minor: A series of courses that display a distinct curricular pattern that is different from the major. Minors are subject to faculty governance review, and appear on the transcript, but not on the diploma. Undergraduate minors normally require a minimum of 18 credit hours of prescribed requirements.

Cognate: A series of courses in one or more disciplines that display a distinct curricular pattern that is different from the major. Undergraduate cognates require a minimum of 12 credit hours and graduate cognates range between 9 and 18 credit hours. Cognates are not subject to faculty governance review and do not appear on either the transcript or the diploma.

Program of Study: A prescribed sequence of learning components comprising an academic program.

For USC Columbia, the program of study format included below provides the standard structure for an academic program using universal terminology for undergraduate programs. Components must follow the sequence and terminology below. All undergraduate programs must include at minimum Carolina Core and Major Requirements components. Inclusion of other components is optional. No course may be applied to more than one component or sub-component within a single program of study.

- **Carolina Core:** The common core of knowledge, skill, and academic experience for all USC Columbia undergraduate students. More generally described as general education requirements.
- **College Requirements:** Foundational requirements for all degrees at the same level and of the same degree type within the college.
- **Program Requirements:** Requirements specific to an academic program that are not major courses. These include the following:
 - **Supporting Courses:** Courses related to and required in preparation for the major but not part of the major requirements.
 - **Cognate:** Undergraduate cognates require a minimum of 12 credit hours in advanced level courses in one or more disciplines that display a distinct curricular pattern that is different from the major. . Cognates are variable according to what is appropriate as determined by the student and the major advisor.

- **Minor:** A series of courses that display a distinct curricular pattern that is different from the major (with a minimum of 18 credit hours of prescribed requirements).
- **Electives:** Unspecified courses open to student selection or preference that are applicable to the program and are counted in the required hours to graduate. Note that these are not major electives.
- **Major Requirements:** The defining characteristics of an academic program, comprised of a series of required courses in a discipline and a particular level of instruction. These courses may include the following:
 - **Major Courses:** Specific required courses in the distinct specialty area.
 - **Major Electives:** Specific courses open to student selection that support the distinct specialty area.
 - **Capstone Project or Thesis:** A culminating research experience in the distinct specialty area.
 - **Concentration:** A series of courses that display a distinct curricular pattern within the major. These are different from minors or cognates which are typically outside of the major. Concentrations are subject to faculty governance review. Concentrations must be approved by CHE to appear on the transcript and in the bulletin. Concentrations do not appear on the diploma. Note: CHE considers options, emphases, tracks, areas, fields, or specializations as concentrations if they appear on the transcript.
- **Additional Academic Opportunities:** Includes academic credentials such as a certificate, minor, or additional major that may be part of the program of study, but are not included in the degree hours or requirements for the primary degree program. Additional academic opportunities must adhere to the requirements and course sharing rules described in the Bulletin.

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy applies to program actions on all campuses including the creation and revision of degrees, majors, minors, and academic certificates. Following initial program approval, subsequent curriculum changes and revisions such as changes in program delivery method or delivery location, or changes to the program name or program designator require additional review and approval.

A. Academic Program Development: Responsibility and Oversight

1. System Oversight

The faculty of the university has authority over matters pertaining to the curriculum on the campus where they serve. The Provost's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support oversees the system-wide approval process through the Board of Trustees. The Provost's Office also ensures that ongoing academic program development on the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses complies with CHE and SACSCOC regulations and in alignment with university strategic goals and priorities. The chief academic affairs officer on each comprehensive campus ensures ongoing academic program development on their campus complies with CHE and SACSCOC regulations and in alignment with university strategic goals and priorities.

2. Campus and Unit Oversight

The deans of the colleges and schools at Columbia, the campus deans on the regional Palmetto College campuses, and the chief academic affairs officers on the comprehensive universities are responsible for implementing this policy and maintaining unit- and campus-level compliance with CHE and SACSCOC regulations.

Within units, program leadership is responsible for ensuring that programs meet the academic expectations of the university and are assessed annually, including monitoring program offerings using specific delivery methods and/or locations.

3. Academic Program Liaisons (APL)

At USC Columbia, APLs serve as the main information resource on academic program actions and as the liaison to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for their respective units. Draft documents and notifications may be forwarded to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support by the APL, but all formal program actions must be submitted through the Academic Programs Proposal Systems (APPS)

[\(https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/planning/academicprograms/proposals/\)](https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/planning/academicprograms/proposals/).

B. Program Action Approval Process

Required approvals as outlined below may take between six months and two years for full review. Programs cannot advertise before approval has been received from the CHE CAAL Committee and SACSCOC when appropriate. Programs may only admit students after CHE and SACSCOC approval (if applicable).

1. Initiation of Program Actions

In most cases, program actions will begin in a department or unit of a campus, college, or school. After consultation with the APL and receipt of unit-level approval, a pre-authorization request may be submitted to the provost for initial approval for USC Columbia; (see

https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/academicpriorities/academicpro

[grams/program-actions/pre-authorizations.php](#) to determine if pre-authorization is required).

All program actions must be approved by the campus, college or school academic affairs officials, and relevant committees as needed, prior to review by the appropriate faculty governance body.

2. Review process for USC Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses

a. Faculty Governance Review

- i. Program actions related to baccalaureate majors, undergraduate certificate programs, and undergraduate minors offered at USC Columbia must be reviewed and approved by the Faculty Senate.
- ii. Program actions related to graduate programs including graduate certificates and minors must be reviewed and approved by the Graduate Council.
- iii. Program actions related to first professional degrees must be reviewed and approved by the faculty governance structure in the respective colleges and schools.
- iv. Program actions related to two-year degrees awarded on the regional Palmetto College campuses must be reviewed and approved by the regional Palmetto College campus Faculty Senate.
- v. Cognates are approved at the campus, college, or school level only and are not reviewed or approved by any university-level faculty governance structure.
- vi. In order to gain faculty governance approval, all USC Columbia program actions must be submitted through the Academic Programs Proposal System (APPS) and be approved by the dean of the responsible campus, college or school or their designee. On the regional Palmetto College campuses, program actions related to associate degrees should be submitted to the regional Palmetto College Faculty Senate. Program actions related to the USC Columbia-based degree completion programs should follow the USC Columbia process. If a program action that impacts another unit or campus is denied by Faculty Senate or Graduate Council because of fiscal impacts, then an appeal may be submitted to the Office of the Provost.

b. Administrative Review

Provost: The Office of the Provost must approve all program actions on the USC Columbia and Palmetto College campuses. In addition, the following reviews are

required when applicable.

- i. College of Education: All proposed new programs and program revisions related to P-12 education at the USC Columbia and Palmetto College campuses require approval by the dean of the College of Education.
- ii. Office of Educational Outreach: All USC Columbia and Palmetto College campus programs offering courses under contract with school districts, other institutions of higher learning, businesses, or other entities require the approval of the Office of Educational Outreach in the College of Education prior to faculty governance review.
- iii. Global Carolina: All USC Columbia and Palmetto College campus programs offered on an off-site international location must be reviewed and approved by Global Carolina.
- iv. Palmetto College: Program actions that may significantly affect the curriculum offerings at the regional Palmetto College campuses must be brought to the attention of and reviewed by the Palmetto College Office.

President: After approval by the Provost, all new academic programs, program modifications as defined by CHE, programs adding 100% online delivery, and program name changes across the entire USC system must be approved by the President. The USC Columbia's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support oversees this system-wide approval process.

Board of Trustees: After approval by the President, all new academic programs, program modifications as defined by CHE, programs adding 100% online delivery, and program name changes across the entire USC system must be approved by the University Board of Trustees. The USC Columbia's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support oversees this system-wide approval process. The Office of the Provost is the sole liaison to the University Board of Trustees for all campuses.

c. CHE and SACSCOC Approval

The Office of the Provost coordinates the notification and submission of all program actions to CHE and to SACSCOC for the USC Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses.

The University is required to submit a notification, program modification, or new program proposal to CHE for program actions in accordance with CHE policy. The University is also required to notify SACSCOC of changes in accordance with the substantive change policy and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of the changes. See

https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/academicpriorities/academicprograms/ or contact the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision

Support for more information about CHE and SACSCOC requirements.

3. Review process for comprehensive universities

a. Faculty Governance Review

All program actions must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate faculty governance structure on each respective campus.

b. Administrative Review

Provost: The comprehensive campus chief academic affairs officer must approve all actions leading to the creation and revision of academic programs.

President: All new academic programs, program modifications as defined by CHE, programs adding 100% online delivery, and program name changes across the entire USC system must be approved by the President. USC Columbia's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support oversees this system-wide approval process.

Board of Trustees: After approval by the President, all new academic programs, program modifications as defined by CHE, programs adding 100% online delivery, and program name changes across the entire USC system must be submitted through the USC Columbia's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for approval by the University Board of Trustees. The Office of the Provost is the sole liaison to the University Board of Trustees for all campuses.

USC Columbia's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will receive a copy of all formal academic program actions and notifications from the Board of Trustees and transmit them to the comprehensive campuses.

c. CHE and SACSCOC Approval

The comprehensive university chief academic affairs officer serves as the liaison to CHE for all program actions and to SACSCOC in all cases. For USC system record-keeping purposes, the USC Columbia Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support must receive a copy of all formal academic program actions and notifications received by the comprehensive campuses from the CHE and SACSCOC.

Specific CHE and SACSCOC notification and approval regulations are the same throughout the entire system.

C. Requirements and characteristics for specific academic programs

1. Undergraduate Certificates: Undergraduate academic certificates may be awarded on any

USC campus and must follow the requirements described in the respective campus Bulletin.

2. Additional major or degree: In some undergraduate degree programs, a student may elect additional majors or pursue more than one degree either simultaneously within the same term or in subsequent terms. Requirements for additional majors and baccalaureate degrees are as described in the Undergraduate Bulletin.

D. Program Development Guidelines

1. Academic Programs

Proposals for a new undergraduate or graduate program should include, as appropriate, the program objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum requirements, and progression/graduation requirements, consideration of faculty and departmental resources, measurable program demand, impact upon existing programs at the university and across the state, and sources of funding.

2. Minors

Proposals for new minors should include as appropriate the prerequisite requirements, curriculum requirements, consideration of faculty and departmental resources, and measurable program demand. Minors do not require program objectives, learning outcomes, or graduation requirements, but they may be provided where appropriate.

3. Academic Certificates

New academic certificate programs fall under the same guidelines as new programs.

4. International Academic Programs

International academic and exchange programs are typically established as contractual arrangements between the university and the international site. They are normally governed by a Memorandum of Understanding spelling out the terms of the contract such as the program curricular requirements, eligibility and application procedures, instructors, program duration, logistical arrangements, and transfer of credit.

Detailed procedural instructions are available in policies [ACAF 2.05 Consortial Academic Contracts and Agreements](#) and [ACAF 2.06 International Academic Agreements](#).

5. Dual or Joint Degree Programs

The APLs in units seeking to create a dual or joint program must prepare a proposal following the appropriate guidelines. For dual degree programs, each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature. For joint degree programs, the participating institutions grant a single academic award bearing the

names, seals, and signatures of each institution. Dual or joint programs must follow the detailed procedural instructions available in [ACAF 2.05 Consortial Academic Contract and Agreements](#). If the agreement is with an international institution, the dual or joint program must also follow the instructions in [ACAF 2.06 International Academic Agreements](#). The MOU for the dual or joint degree programs must address admissions and progression requirements, the percentage of the degree that needs to be completed at the home institution, in-residence requirements, and graduation requirements.

6. Combination Degree Programs

The APLs in the units seeking to create a combination degree program must collaborate in preparing a joint proposal, following the appropriate guidelines depending on the type of program.

The proposal requires the approval of the faculty and leadership in all collaborating programs, and letters of acknowledgement from all university units in closely related disciplines.

7. Other Collaborative Degree Programs

The APLs in units seeking to create a collaborative program must prepare a proposal following the appropriate guidelines. Programs involving an articulated transfer of credit must follow the detailed procedural instructions available in [ACAF 2.05 Consortial Academic Contract and Agreements](#) and [ACAF 2.06 International Academic Agreements](#) as applicable.

8. Interdisciplinary or Interprofessional Academic Programs

Faculty members of the disciplines seeking to establish an interdisciplinary or interprofessional program must determine the nature of their collaboration, the type(s) of degree program(s) and/or minor they wish to pursue, and division of teaching and administrative responsibilities among program participants. Proposals for new majors, certificates and minors fall under the respective guidelines detailed above. Each instance in which an interdisciplinary or interprofessional program is created, revised, or terminated requires letters of acknowledgement from all related academic units.

Interdisciplinary or Interprofessional programs without related degree programs are governed by policy [ACAF 2.02 Establishment and Modification of Academic Administrative Units](#).

E. University Bulletins

The official University Undergraduate Bulletin and Graduate Bulletin exist in electronic form only.

The online bulletins are frozen on February 15 each year to establish the guidelines and

regulations under which each incoming class matriculates. The bulletin becomes the archived bulletin of record for the coming academic year, containing the official language used to describe academic programs at USC. Both the undergraduate and graduate bulletins are maintained by the Office of the Registrar. Changes to the bulletins must be approved by the appropriate faculty governance bodies. Therefore, the effective date for a program change is the publication date of the next bulletin, after any required Board of Trustees, CHE and SACSCOC approvals and notifications are completed; new programs can be added to the bulletin at any time after the approvals and notifications.

Comprehensive universities and professional schools at USC Columbia each have academic bulletins/catalogs subject to the unit-wide faculty governance approval policies of those units. See policy [ACAF 3.50 Academic Bulletins and Planning Calendar](#) for additional information.

F. Program Assessment

All academic programs should be developed with program objectives using measurable learning outcomes and expectations. For USC Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses, achievement of these outcomes must be assessed on an annual basis by the individual academic unit as well as by the campus, college or school dean, or chief academic affairs officer as described in policy [ACAF 3.00 Assessment of Student Learning](#).

Comprehensive universities conduct their own assessments and maintain separate assessment records.

G. Program Review

The University of South Carolina is committed to the comprehensive periodic review of all degree-granting academic programs as an essential part of ongoing strategic planning.

Programs with a professional program accreditation will follow the review timeline and process of the accrediting body, For those programs not undergoing a professional program accreditation, external reviews conducted at least every seven (7) years are necessary as described in policy [ACAF 2.20 Academic Program Review](#). Costs of the review are to be borne by the unit or college/school housing the academic program. The unit housing the academic program is responsible for providing documentation on the unit's program review procedures as well as copies of all accreditation and external review reports to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support.

PROCEDURES

A. Procedure for Comprehensive Universities

Each comprehensive university should develop individual campus-based procedures to implement this policy.

B. Procedure for USC Columbia and Regional Palmetto College campuses

Detailed procedural instructions regarding all program and curriculum development actions are provided at

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/provost/planning/academicprograms/.

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 2.02 Establishment and Modification of Academic Administrative Units](#)

[ACAF 2.03 Creation and Revision of Academic Courses](#)

[ACAF 2.05 Consortial Academic Agreements](#)

[ACAF 2.06 International Academic Agreements](#)

[ACAF 2.20 Academic Program Review](#)

[ACAF 3.00 Assessment of Student Learning](#)

[ACAF 3.50 Academic Bulletins and Planning Calendar](#)

[USC Columbia Faculty Manual](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
Date 1	New policy approval
February 17, 2017	Policy revised to account for the electronic curricular approval system, new or changed university procedures, new or changed CHE and SACSCOC regulations, and the development of new related policies.
October 12, 2022	Policy revised to account for the electronic curricular approval system (new version of APPS using CourseLeaf's CIM software), new or changed university procedures, new or changed CHE and SACSCOC regulations, and revisions to related policies. The revision allows creation of undergraduate academic certificates.
February 24, 2025	Policy revised to update definitions, allow for graduate minors, and clarify processes.