

POLICY ON SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE AND NOTIFYING THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES OF THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS (SACSCOC)

I. POLICY STATEMENT

This University Policy establishes the requirements and procedures to ensure timely, accurate and complete notification of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) whenever the University or any of its units proposes to make a significant modification in the nature or scope of the institution's activities at the time of its most recent evaluation by SACSCOC.

II. POLICY PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this policy is to ensure continuous compliance with the standard and supporting policy on substantive change of SACSCOC. The University is a member of SACSCOC, which is its regional accrediting body, recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an agency whose accreditation entitles its member institutions to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV programs.

III. EFFECTIVE DATE

APPROVED: September 20, 2010

IV. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all officers Auburn University who can initiate, review, approve or allocate resources to changes in any of the University's programs or activities, whether academic or non-academic, that may be considered a substantive change according the SACSCOC policy.

Within academic areas, such changes may originate with individual faculty members or groups of faculty members, with department committees or department heads/chairs, with deans or associate deans, with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, or with any other area reporting to the Provost. (See Attachment A, [Auburn University Organization Chart](#)).

In areas outside of Academic Affairs, potential substantive changes may originate with individual units, with management teams within Vice Presidential or Executive Director areas, with the Vice Presidents and Executive Directors themselves, or with the President or those in the President's direct reporting line. (See Attachment A, [Auburn University Organization Chart](#)).

Each individual hereby designated is required to be familiar and comply with this policy.

V. POLICY MANAGEMENT

Responsible Office: SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison

Responsible Executive: University President

Responsible Officer: Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

VI. DEFINITIONS

Substantive Change: A significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. (See Table 1, below.) Source: SACSCOC.

Examples of changes deemed substantive by SACSCOC include, but are not limited to the following:

Curricular/instructional changes

- Initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level than currently approved
- Adding a program at the current level that departs significantly from current programs
- Initiating joint degrees with another institution
- Initiating a certificate program at a new off-campus site or that is a significant departure
- Initiating an off-campus site where at least 25% of the credit for a program can be obtained
- Expanding course or program offerings at a previously approved off-campus site
- Adding programs that are significantly different from current programs
- Initiating distance learning programs or components amounting to at least 25% of a program
- Initiating programs/courses offered through contractual or consortial agreements
- Relocating a previously approved off-campus site
- Altering significantly the length of an educational program
- Closing an educational program

Other changes

- Initiating a branch campus
- Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution
- Initiating a merger or consolidation with another institution
- Relocating a main or branch campus
- Changing an institution's governance, ownership, control or legal status
- Closing an institution

Procedure One: SACSCOC procedure associated with a substantive change which 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. Source: SACSCOC.

Procedure Two: SACSCOC procedure associated with a substantive change which requires SACSCOC notification prior to implementation. Source: SACSCOC.

Procedure Three: SACSCOC procedure associated with Approval of a Consolidation/Merger. Source: SACSCOC.

Branch Campus: A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature; (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority. Source: SACSCOC.

Degree Completion Program: A program where the institution accepts or requires a substantial amount of transfer credit prior to entry and only the program major portion is offered.

Distance Learning: A formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies. Source: SACSCOC.

Level: SACSCOC's level taxonomy categorizes institutions by the highest degree offered. Because it offers four or more doctorate degrees, Auburn University is designated as a Level VI institution.

Merger/Consolidation: The Commission on Colleges defines a consolidation as the combination or transfer of the assets of at least two distinct institutions (corporations) to that of a newly formed institution (corporation), and defines a merger as the acquisition by one institution of another institution's assets. For the purposes of accreditation, consolidations and mergers are considered substantive changes requiring review by the Commission on Colleges. (Examples include: a senior college acquiring a junior college, a degree-granting institution acquiring a non-degree-granting institution, two junior or senior colleges consolidating to form a new institution, or an institution accredited by the Commission on Colleges merging with a non-accredited institution). Source: SACSCOC.

Off-Campus Site: Campus location providing educational course and/or program offerings that is at a different address than the main campus location. Source: SACSCOC.

Program or Program of Study: A course of study leading to a formal award, e.g., degree, certificate.

SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison: In the years between accreditation reviews, the Accreditation Liaison is responsible for ensuring the timely submission of annual institutional profiles and other reports as requested by the Commission. With the chief executive officer, the accreditation liaison is responsible for the accuracy of all information submitted to the Commission and for ensuring ongoing compliance with Commission standards, policies, and procedures beyond reaffirmation. During the Reaffirmation Cycle, the Liaison serves on the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Leadership Team and oversees all staffing aspects of the Reaffirmation process. Source: SACSCOC.

Teach-Out: The process by which the University provides instructional and academic support services to students enrolled at a site that has been closed and/or in a program that has been discontinued. The teach-out process often extends well beyond the closing of a site or program to allow time for enrolled students to complete their programs in a reasonable amount of time.

Teach-Out Agreement: A written agreement between accredited institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students if one of those institutions stops offering an educational program before all students enrolled in that program complete the program. Source: SACSCOC.

VII. POLICY PROCEDURES

As defined by SACSCOC and used in this policy, a substantive change is any action that significantly modifies or expands the University's scope as recognized at the time of its most recent evaluation by SACSCOC. Examples are given in Section VI. Definitions.

At the earliest stage of preliminary planning, notification of any potential change that could be deemed substantive (as defined in this policy) must be submitted in writing via the applicable reporting line to the Provost or appropriate Vice President/Executive Director and thence to the President. The President may delegate to the Provost or other appropriate senior administrator responsibility for reviewing proposed substantive changes.

These notifications must include: (a) the title of the proposed change; (b) a brief description of the change, including its nature (e.g., new educational program, new off-campus site, initiation of distance education) and its scope (one program, multiple programs in one college, inter-collegiate program, etc.); (c) contact information for the responsible individual; (d) a tentative timeline for approval, including steps in the approval process (e.g., College Curriculum Committee, University Curriculum Committee, Board of Trustees, Alabama Commission on Higher Education, etc.); and (e) the earliest possible date for implementation.

In academic areas, these preliminary notifications will be reviewed by the Substantive Change Review Committee, composed of the academic administrative officers who oversee activities where most substantive changes occur: the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison (chair); the Dean of the Graduate School,

who chairs the Graduate Council; the Provost, who chairs the Curriculum Committee; the Assistant Provost for International Programs; and the administrator overseeing distance learning programs. Upon recommendation from this committee, the Provost will determine whether the proposed change should move forward, be modified, or be set aside. In areas outside of Academic Affairs, upon notification by the relevant Vice President/Executive Director and with that person's consent, the institution's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will appoint and chair an *ad hoc* committee to review proposed substantive changes and bring recommendations for disposition by the relevant Vice President/Executive Director.

The SACSCOC Policy entitled *Substantive Changes for Accredited Institutions* defines the term "substantive change" and provides instructions for notification or approval by SACSCOC. Table 1, derived from Attachment B to that policy, lists examples of the types of changes which are considered to be substantive under this policy.

Table 1. Types of Substantive Change and Applicable SACSCOC Procedures

Types of Change	Procedure	Prior Notification Required	Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC	Prior Approval Required	Documentation
Initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level than currently approved	1	Yes	12 months	Yes	Application for Level Change (Due dates: April 15 or October 1)
Expanding at current degree level (<i>significant departures from current programs</i>) ¹	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating a branch campus (see definition in Section VI of this document)	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating joint or dual degrees with another institution	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating a certificate program (typically for workforce development):					
• using existing approved courses	NA	NA	NA	NA	None
• a previously approved program at a new off-campus site	1	Yes	Approval prior to implementation	Yes	Modified prospectus
• that is a significant departure from previously approved programs ¹	1	Yes	Approval prior to implementation	Yes	Modified prospectus
Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School programs offered at a high school):					
• possible for a student to obtain 50% or more of the credits toward program completion	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
• 25%-49% of credits	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification
• less than 25% of credits	NA	NA	NA	NA	None
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off-campus sites:					
• adding programs that are significantly different from current programs	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification
• adding programs that are not significantly different from current programs	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 1. Types of Substantive Changes and Applicable SACSCOC Procedures (continued)

Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution ²	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating distance learning:					
• offering 50% or more of a program (adding subsequent programs requires advance notification only for programs that are significant departures from the originally approved programs) ¹	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
• 25%-49% of credits	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification
• less than 25% of credits	NA	NA	NA	NA	None
Initiating programs/courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification and copy of signed agreement
Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution	3	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus (Due dates: April 15 or October 1)
Relocating a main or branch campus	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Relocating an off-campus instructional site	2	Yes	Prior to implementation	No	Letter of notification
Changing governance, ownership, control or legal status of an institution	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Changing from clock hours to credit hours	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Altering significantly the length of a program ²	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Initiating degree completion programs	1	Yes	6 months	Yes	Prospectus
Closing an institution or program (see SACSCOC policy "Closing a Program or Institution"):					
• closing a program with an internal teach-out protocol	2	Yes	Prior to implementation		Description of plan
• closing a program with a teach-out agreement with another institution	2	Yes	Prior to implementation		Copy of teach-out agreement
• closing an institution	2	Yes	Prior to implementation		Description of plan

¹ A significant departure in program is one in which the proposed new program has no closely related counterpart among the previously approved programs in the curriculum. To determine if a new program is a "significant departure," it is helpful to ask if the new program requires a) numbers of new faculty, b) many new courses, c) new library or other learning resources, d) new equipment or facilities, or e) a new resource base.

² Significant changes in mission are those that lead to a fundamental shift in the nature of the institution, such as an institution that had previously offered only professional programs deciding to add general education offerings, or a technical college transforming itself into a comprehensive community college.

³ Significant changes in program length are those with noticeable impact on the program's completion time (e.g., increasing a baccalaureate degree from 124 hours to 150 hours).

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 (or relevant Vice President/Executive Director) 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. The Provost and the SACSCOC Liaison will oversee the process of preparing appropriate notification, in conjunction with those involved with the change, according to the requirements in SACSCOC Policy entitled *Substantive Changes for Accredited Institutions* and in other related policy and accreditation documents maintained by SACSCOC.

Auburn's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will send initial written notification of this policy to all responsible University officers and faculty (as identified in IV. APPLICABILITY) and will send thereafter annual written reminders regarding their responsibility for compliance. The President, Provost, Vice Presidents and Executive Directors are responsible to see that their respective areas provide notification of any potential Substantive Changes under this policy. The Provost and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will offer periodic training sessions on substantive change and will ensure that information regarding this policy, associated resources available from SACSCOC, and answers to frequently asked questions are made available on the Provost's website.

VIII. SANCTIONS

If Auburn University 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 same sanction may be applied by the President or relevant Vice President/Executive Director.

IX. EXCLUSIONS

No exclusions from this University policy will be permitted.

X. 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 President, Provost, or appropriate Vice President/Executive Director and the institution's assigned SACSCOC Vice President before rendering an opinion.

APPENDICES

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges" (17 pages, with two exhibits), last edited July 2010, accessed September 20, 2010.

Posted at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/SubstantiveChange.pdf>