

University of South Alabama Policy and Procedure for Monitoring and Reporting Substantive Changes

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires all accredited institutions to have a written substantive change policy and procedure that is approved through institutional processes. The approved policy will be accessible to those within the university and to those in the general public.

“Substantive Change is defined by SACSCOC as a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes, and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs and services.”

The SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy can be found here:
<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>

The SACSCOC Liaison is responsible for monitoring and reporting compliance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy. The Liaison is also tasked with providing education and training about substantive change across the University so that key personnel recognize when to consult the University’s substantive change policy and when to contact the SACSCOC Liaison about a potential substantive change. When the SACSCOC Liaison is unable to determine definitively whether a change falls within the scope of the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy, the SACSCOC Liaison or the University President will confer with the University’s assigned SACSCOC staff member.

Just as the entire University is responsible for helping the University maintain its accreditation, the entire University is also responsible for communicating with the SACSCOC Liaison about potential substantive changes as they arise.

Substantive Change Procedure: proposal of new academic programs

- 1) Upon submission of a new program to ACHE for approval, the proposal is forwarded to the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison for substantive change evaluation. The proposal must indicate the percent of the program (by credit hour) that is new coursework of the same or at a different level. It also must indicate the percentage of the program’s instructional modality (face-to-face, distance: synchronous or distance: asynchronous). It also must indicate the percentage of the program’s method of delivery (traditional course based, competency based: course model, competency based: direct assessment model).
- 2) The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison forwards the evaluation to the Provost’s Office, as well as the Dean, Chair, and/or Program Coordinator of the college or school that is responsible for the program. If there are changes to program content or instructional modality prior to submission for ACHE approval, the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison must be consulted for a subsequent evaluation.
- 3) Upon program approval from ACHE, or before at the direction of the Provost’s Office, either a) final documentation that the program is not a substantive change is recorded or b) materials are prepared (e.g., notification or approval) for submission to SACSCOC.
- 4) The Substantive Change process is managed by the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison. The Liaison communicates with the Provost’s Office as well as the Dean, Chair, and/or Program Coordinator of the college or school responsible for the proposed program throughout the process.

Substantive Change Procedure: significant modification of academic programs: instructional modality, method of delivery, use of prior learning, program length (credit hour or expected time to completion):

- 1) The SACSCOC Liaison must be alerted immediately upon completion of a program redesign or modification to ensure timely submission of SACSCOC Substantive Change materials. The SACSCOC Liaison should be consulted early-on in the development phase so that the timeline needed for any SACSCOC Substantive Change notification or approval processes can be built into the implementation timeline.
- 2) The SACSCOC Liaison will make a determination about whether the proposal a) is not a substantive change, b) requires a substantive change notification, or c) requires a substantive change approval.
- 3) If notification or approval for a substantive change is required, the process is managed by the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison. The Liaison communicates with the Provost's Office, as well as the Dean, Chair, and/or Program Coordinator of the college or school responsible for the proposed program throughout the process.

Substantive change and marketing, advertising, recruitment, and admissions

Substantive changes are subject to SACSCOC's Advertising and Student Recruitment policy. Marketing, advertising, and recruitment may start after a prospectus is submitted and before receiving approval provided the disclaimer statement of pending approval in the Advertising and Student Recruitment policy is clearly included in all marketing information. Admission applications may be taken, but admission offers – including contingent offers – should not be made until the substantive change is approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

Substantive Change Procedure for program closure

- 1) The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison must be notified immediately upon the decision to close a program, discontinue offering a program, or discontinue enrollment into a program on the main campus and/or at an off-campus instructional site.
- 2) The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will collect the needed information to develop the notification to SACSCOC and will communicate with the Provost's Office as well as the Dean, Chair, and/or Program Coordinator of the college or school responsible for the proposed program throughout the process.

Unlike the development or modification of academic programs, there are many types of substantive change that may not have systematized and/or standardized processes. For these types of substantive change (listed below), the SACSCOC Liaison must be consulted early-on as part of the decision making process.

Creating or modifying partnerships, which include:

- Cooperative academic arrangements where USA students enroll in courses delivered by another institution but the credit is recorded as granted by USA.
- Dual academic award/Dual degree where a USA student receives instruction by two or more institutions and is granted the same degree at the same level by each institution resulting in more than one degree.
- Joint academic award where a USA student receives instruction by two or more institutions and is granted one degree bearing the names and seals of all participating institutions.

Institutional changes, which include:

- Change in measurement of student progress to completion (e.g., credit hours to clock

- hours or credit-based to competency-based)
- Governance changes (e.g., significantly altering Board of Trustee's by-laws, board expansion/contraction, changes in authority or responsibility)
 - Institution closure
 - Institution relocation
 - Acquisition of another institution, program, or off-site instructional location from another institution of higher education or any other entity.
 - Institutional contingency teach-out plan occurs if (placed on probation by SACSCOC; loss of accreditation by SACSCOC; revocation of state authorization; provisional certification or reimbursement method for financial aid with the US Department of Education; subject of emergency action by US Department of Education.
 - Level change
 - Merger or consolidation with another institution of higher education or other entity
 - Mission change (e.g., changing the fundamental mission under which we operate, such as rejecting research as part of our mission)
 - Means of control, legal status change, change of ownership

Off-campus instructional sites, which are geographically apart from the main campus and which include:

- Opening or closing an off-campus instructional site including a branch campus (must be permanent, have its own faculty and administrative structure, and have its own budgetary and hiring authority)
- Changing the name or location of an off-campus instructional site