

PROCEDURE ONE

The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Approval Prior to Implementation

Changes Requiring Approval

Substantive changes requiring submission of an application or a prospectus, and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees prior to implementation by the institution are as follows:

1. **Initiating coursework, certificates, or programs of study at a different level than those previously approved by SACSCOC.** Institutions may not offer individual credit courses or programs beyond the level of current accreditation. Examples include: an associate degree-granting college initiating bachelor's degrees or a four-year institution initiating degrees at the master's level; a graduate institution initiating degrees at the undergraduate level, a baccalaureate degree-granting institution initiating occupational and technical degrees at the associate degree level. An institution requesting a level change should complete an [Application](#) for Members Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level.

Note: Repackaging of an existing approved curriculum to create a new degree level, such as an institution that offers a full 120-hour baccalaureate program creating an associate degree from its lower-division offerings, usually requires only advance notification, not approval.

SACSCOC classifies institutions according to the highest degree level offered by an institution. Those classifications are as follows:

Level I	Offers the associate degree as the highest degree
Level II	Offers the baccalaureate degree as the highest degree
Level III	Offers the master's degree as the highest degree
Level IV	Offers the master's and specialist degree as the highest degrees
Level V	Offers three or fewer doctorate degrees as highest degrees
Level VI	Offers four or more doctorate degrees

An institution adding a fourth doctorate degree, causing it to be reclassified from Level V to Level VI, is required to request the level change in writing in order for SACSCOC to reclassify the institution within its data base.

Applications for a change from Level III to Level IV and Level V to Level VI will be reviewed and, if possible, approved by staff.

2. **Initiating certificate programs for workforce development.** These are typically offered at the request of an employer, either on campus or at the workplace. Offering previously approved certificate programs at an unapproved off-campus site requires approval of the site prior to implementation. Similarly, offering a certificate program that is a significant departure from existing approved certificate programs, either on or off campus, requires approval of the program prior to implementation. SACSCOC will waive the six-month notification requirement and accept a modified prospectus consisting of the name of the certificate, date of implementation, the complete physical address of the off-campus site (if applicable), a faculty roster, a discipline-specific description of library/learning resources, a description of physical facilities, and descriptions of courses to be offered at the site.
3. **Initiating other certificate programs.** Certificate programs consisting of courses drawn from the existing approved curriculum for a degree or diploma program do not require separate approval; they are considered to be included in the institution's current accreditation. However, to offer

such a certificate at a new site requires approval of the site. A certificate that is a significant departure from previously approved programs must be approved in advance—the same as any other new educational program.

4. **Initiating an off-campus (additional) site (*site-based/classroom group instruction*) at which students can earn at least 50% of the credits toward an educational program.** Locations at which instruction is offered by distance delivery, but students must be present on-site to access such instruction, are considered off-campus instructional sites and must be approved in advance.

Approval of an off-campus site is effective for a maximum of five years and will be reviewed again in the context of the fifth-year or decennial review.

For an institution replicating an approved educational program that is already offered at three or more approved sites, a modified prospectus consisting of a faculty roster, descriptions of the courses to be offered at the site, a description of discipline-specific library resources, a description of student support services, and a description of physical resources will suffice in lieu of responding to the requirements of a full prospectus.

5. **Initiating degree completion programs.** Degree completion programs usually include a compressed format with classes offered evenings or weekends to accommodate working adults, a requirement to transfer in some amount of previous college credit, and may include offering credit for career or life experience. The prospectus should include a discussion of how the degree completion program differs from the same program offered in traditional form, and how the institution will ensure that student learning outcomes are the same for both offerings. An example of such a change is adult or accelerated programs in management or organizational leadership.
6. **Initiating a branch campus.** A branch campus is defined as 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. The prospectus for a proposed branch campus must include a business plan for the branch campus that describes:
 - The educational program(s) to be offered at the branch campus;
 - The projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus; and
 - The operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus.
7. **Initiating distance learning or correspondence courses and programs by which students can earn at least 50% of a program's credits through delivery in a format other than face-to-face.** Institutions must demonstrate that a student who registers for a distance or correspondence course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. Means of verification might include a secure login and pass code, proctored examinations, or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification. Processes used to verify student identity must also protect student privacy. Please see also the SACSCOC policy "[Distance and Correspondence Education.](#)"
8. **Expanding at the institution's current degree level (*significant departure from current programs*).** What constitutes a "significant departure" from existing programs depends on what related programs are currently in place at a given institution. Refer to the Glossary of Terms for more specificity. Examples include the following: developing a new general education program, adding a master's degree in nursing when the institution is accredited at Level III but currently offers only a master's degree in education; an institution accredited at Level II (bachelor's degrees), offering only a bachelor's degree with a major in religion, adding three new bachelor's degrees with majors in biology, business administration, and computer science.

9. **Initiating a significant change in the established mission of the institution.** Significant changes in mission are those that lead to a fundamental shift in the nature of the institution. Examples include the following: the transformation of a technical college into a comprehensive community college, the initiation by a seminary of significant liberal arts offerings, the addition by a medical college of general education offerings, the initiation of an engineering school at a liberal arts institution. Editorial changes in the language of a mission statement are **not** substantive and need not be reported. See Commission staff regarding the prospectus. The change in mission may dictate a mix of required documentation.
10. **Changing from clock hours to credit hours.** The prospectus must include a clear explanation of the formula used to calculate equivalency of credit awarded. Please see also the SACSCOC policy "[Credit Hours](#)."
11. **Changing significantly the length of a program, substantially increasing the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program.** Significant changes in program length are those with noticeable impact on the program's completion time. Examples include the following: expanding a certificate program from 250 contact hours to 450 contact hours, increasing a baccalaureate degree from 124 hours to 150 hours.
12. **Relocating a main or branch campus.** The prospectus should demonstrate that the new facilities maintain the institution's compliance with Comprehensive Standard 3.11.
13. **Initiating a collaborative academic program with another institution not accredited by SACSCOC.** The prospectus should demonstrate compliance with the SACSCOC policy "[Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures](#)". Examples include joint degree or dual degree programs.
14. **Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs.** This applies if the entity provides 25% or more of an educational program offered by the accredited institution. The prospectus must include a copy of the signed agreement.

The Procedure for Approval

Time of Notification

An institution undergoing substantive change requiring prior approval must provide written notification of the change to the President of SACSCOC in accord with the designated times outlined in the table on pages 6-9 of this document. In some cases, prior notification is not required.

If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact SACSCOC staff for consultation.

Submission of a Prospectus or an Application

Prospectus: Prospectuses may be submitted in print form or on flash drive, CD or DVD (submit one copy). Once the prospectus has been submitted, the institution may advertise and recruit students to a new program or site as long as all materials clearly state that the program or site is pending approval by SACSCOC.

Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level: The application for change of degree level must be submitted by April 15 for consideration at the June meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, or by September 15 for consideration at the December meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to allow ample time for review and approval. Four copies of the completed application should be submitted to the President of SACSCOC as a print document or on flash drive, CD or DVD.

Staff Options

Upon receipt of a substantive change **prospectus**, a SACSCOC staff member will review the prospectus and any supporting material submitted by the institution and will recommend to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees one of the actions listed below:

1. approve the substantive change or
2. refer the substantive change to the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports for review and a final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

Upon receipt of an **application** for initiating coursework or programs at a level different from that for which it is approved, the application will be forwarded automatically to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review and approval at its next scheduled meeting: June or December.

Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports Following Review of the Prospectus or of the Application

Prospectus: The Committee will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the prospectus and recommend approval of the program, with or without a site visit. A site visit is required within six months after the initiation of the following approved substantive changes:
 - (a) consolidation/merger; a change of ownership resulting in a change of control; change of governance, ownership, legal status
 - (b) a branch campus
 - (c) an off-campus site at which a student can earn at least 50% of the credit toward an educational program, if any of the following applies: the institution
 - has a total of three or fewer additional locations at which 50% or more of a programs credits are offered, or
 - has not demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations, or
 - has been placed on sanction by SACSCOC or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation
2. defer action and seek additional information
3. recommend denial of approval of the substantive change and continue the institution's accreditation. The reason for denial of approval may have been caused by an institution's current non-compliance with a standard or requirement. Consequently, denial may be accompanied by monitoring or imposition of a sanction.

Application for Member Institutions Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level.

An application for offering programs at a level different from that for which the institution is approved is automatically referred to the Committees on Compliance and Reports, except for a change in degree levels from III to IV and from V to VI which are reviewed by staff. The Committee will review the application and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the application and approve the program, with a site visit within six months after initiation of the substantive change
2. defer action and seek additional information

3. deny approval of the substantive change and continue the institution's accreditation. The reason for denial of approval may have been caused by an institution's current non-compliance with a standard or requirement. Consequently, denial may be accompanied by monitoring or imposition of a sanction.

Preparation for a Substantive Change Committee Visit

When a Substantive Change Committee is authorized, it is charged with determining the institution's continued compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* following the initiation of the change. The visit will occur within six months *after* initiation of the change. In preparation for this visit, the institution will complete the appropriate substantive change documentation template, which cites relevant Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards and Federal Requirements, and the roster of faculty members who will be teaching in the program or at the site. Both the template and the Faculty Roster form are available on the SACSCOC Web site (www.sacscoc.org) under "Substantive Changes". The institution's SACSCOC staff representative will inform the institution of the composition and schedule for the Committee.

Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports Following Review by a Substantive Change Committee

The report of the Substantive Change Committee, together with the response of the institution to the recommendations contained in that report (due within five months of the Committee visit), will be reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports. The Committee on Compliance and Reports may recommend one of the following actions:

1. continue the institution in accreditation, with or without a monitoring report
2. continue the institution in accreditation, impose a sanction, and request a monitoring report, with/without a special committee visit (mandatory visit if placed on Probation)
3. discontinue accreditation