Academic Procedures & Regulations (APR)

APR Title:	Substantive Change Compliance for Institutional Accreditation
APR Number:	30	Revised Date:	June 28, 2022

Purpose

This document supports Western Carolina University's efforts to maintain quality academic programs and to foster continuous program improvement through timely documentation and reporting of substantive program changes to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). SACSCOC's *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*[1] requires WCU to report ALL substantive changes accurately and in a timely manner to the Commission on Colleges. The purpose of this policy is to describe the process and procedures to be utilized to ensure that WCU complies with this Commission on Colleges policy.

SACSCOC Substantive Change information: https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/.

Scope

WCU's *Substantive Change Compliance for Institutional Accreditation Policy* applies to EACH academic unit and department and is MANDATORY. No substantive change can be implemented until a letter of approval, or an acceptance of notification is received from SACSCOC. Prior to receipt of the letter of approval, any distribution of information, including advertising, must include wording that the program is pending SACSCOC approval.

This policy does not cover notification requirements related to programmatic accrediting agencies. Accredited programs may have additional notification and reporting obligations to their accrediting agency.

Definition(s)

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Under federal regulations, substantive change includes

- Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.

- Changing the legal status, form of control, or ownership of an institution.

- Changing the governance of an institution.

- Merging / consolidating two or more institutions or entities.

- Acquiring another institution or any program or location of another institution.

- Relocating an institution or an off-campus instructional site of an institution (including a branch campus).

- Offering courses or programs at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.

- Adding graduate programs at an institution previously offering only undergraduate programs (including degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other for-credit credential).

- Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non–time-based methods or measures.

- Adding a program that is a significant departure from the existing programs, or method of delivery, from those offered when the institution was last evaluated.

- Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.

- Adding an additional method of delivery to a currently offered program.

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[1] The *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures document* (SACSCOC, 2022) can be found on the Commission's website: https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/.

- Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement.

- Entering into a written arrangement under 34 C.F.R. § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.

- Substantially increase or decreasing the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of one or more programs.

- Adding competency-based education programs.

- Adding each competency-based education program by direct assessment.

- Adding programs with completion pathways that recognize and accommodate a student's prior or existing knowledge or competency.

- Awarding dual or joint academic awards.

- Re-opening a previously closed program or off-campus instructional site.

- Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.

- Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.

- Closing an institution, a program, a method of delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees has approved additional substantive changes that require notification and, in some cases, approval prior to implementation. This policy and its procedures address substantive changes identified through Federal regulations and Board approval.

More important for deans and department heads are examples of substantive changes that might typically originate with proposals from department or academic program leadership including:

- Expanding programs at current degree level;

- Altering the length of a program significantly (where >25% of program course content is new to the institution);

- Modifying a program such that >25% of course content is new to the institution;

- Initiating joint degrees with another institution;

- Initiating a certificate program (example: continuing Education credit) at employer's request and on short notice;

- Initiating other certificate programs;

- Initiating off-campus sites;

- Relocating an off-campus instructional site;

- Initiating online programs or other programs where the faculty and students are not in the same location that are significantly different from current online offerings;

- Initiating degree completion programs;

- Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium;

- Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs;

- Acquiring any program or site from another institution; and

- Closing a program or approved off-campus site.

<u>The initiation or relocation of off-campus instructional sites and the addition of new programs that represent significant departures from current offerings are the MOST COMMONLY reported education substantive changes.</u> A "significant departure" is one in which the proposed new program has no closely related counterpart among the previously approved education programs in the curriculum. To determine whether a new program is a "significant departure," the Commission on Colleges considers whether the new program requires significant amounts of additional faculty, courses, library or other learning resources, equipment or facilities, or financial resources.

Procedure

The process that WCU will use to ensure compliance with the *Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions* document involves the following four methods: 1) implementing effective communication and procedures, 2) providing adequate resources, 3) conducting periodic training, and 4) utilizing quality assurance safeguards.

Communication and Procedures

- Detailed procedures regarding all internal and external (UNC General Administration and SACSCOC) academic program planning and revision processes are found in WCU's *Academic Procedure and Regulation (APR 17)* and *Faculty Handbook*, especially Sections 13.00 and 14.00 (http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-provost/resources-for-faculty-andstaff/index.asp).

- Academic units follow the procedures outlined in *APR 17* and in the *Handbook* to obtain internal approval for substantive changes.

- The Office of the Provost (specifically, the associate provost) alerts the university SACSCOC accreditation liaison regarding any curricular decisions that are potential substantive change actions.

- College Accreditation Liaisons (CALs) meet with the Associate Provost and the university's SACSCOC accreditation liaison once per semester for updates on SACSCOC accreditation business.

- CALs or their proxies notify the SACSCOC accreditation liaisons when new program proposals or changes to programs are being considered.

- The university SACSCOC accreditation liaison is responsible for reviewing curricular decisions brought forth by the associate provost and determining if the action requires substantive change notice to the Commission on Colleges.

- The university SACSCOC accreditation liaison prepares notices and required documentation for submission to the Commission on Colleges with appropriate notices to the provost and chancellor.

- Actions and decisions are communicated to appropriate deans and stakeholders according to the guidelines in *APR 17*.

Resources

- Policies, procedures, and information regarding substantive change can be found on the SACSCOC website. (https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/)

- WCU's accreditation information and SACSCOC resources, are maintained on WCU's SACSCOC SharePoint site. (https://intranet.wcu.edu/academicaffairs/sacs/Pages/default.aspx)

- College and program accreditation resources, information on substantive changes for academic programs, and information and resources for CALs, are located on the Institutional Planning and Effectiveness SharePoint site. (https://intranet.wcu.edu/academicaffairs/unitsites/IPE/SitePages/Home.aspx)

- The Associate Provost and the University SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison (currently the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness) provide guidance for all internal and external reporting activities.

Training

The Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness provides accreditation-related information to CALs at scheduled meetings each semester. Consultation and training for other university stakeholders is available upon request.

Quality Assurance

- The Office of the Provost maintains and monitors program changes using the *Curriculog* curriculum management software platform.

- Procedures and information contained in *APR 17* and the *Faculty Handbook* are reviewed and published periodically by the office of the Provost.

- The university registrar will implement program and course-related changes upon receiving the official SACSCOC letters from the Office of the Provost.

- The Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness annually reviews programmatic course offerings, including activity at off-campus instructional sites to ensure compliance with SACSCOC approvals.

- Annually, a list of program changes routed through curriculog is produced and reviewed by the SACSCOC liaison to confirm timely reporting of substantive change activity.

Enforcement

Responsibility for enforcement of this policy resides with the provost. The deans are responsible for their units adhering to the procedures set forth within *APR 17* and the *Faculty Handbook*, and the provost is responsible for ensuring that they do. The College Accreditation Liaisons will work with the SACSCOC Liaison to ensure college programs maintain compliance with relevant SACSCOC principles and related federal regulations. The assistant vice chancellor for planning and effectiveness serves as the liaison to the SACSCOC with responsibility to report substantive changes in a timely manner.

Review

The Provost's Executive Council, and the College Accreditation Liaisons have reviewed and approved WCU's *Substantive Change Compliance Policy*. This policy will be reviewed and updated periodically as appropriate.

Revision History
Effective: 6/28/2022
Revised: 1/5/12, 11/18/14, 8/13/15, 6/28/2022
Versions prior to 6/28/2022 revision were included in APR17 as an appendix.