

# UT Substantive Change Policy

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(Revised May 2016)

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## Introduction

The Chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) is required to notify the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges of (SACSCOC) of any proposed modification of the essential characteristics of UT as an educational institution. We, the administrators, faculty and staff, are obliged to assist with recognizing and reporting such substantive changes.<sup>1</sup>

SACSCOC is mandated by the U.S. Department of Education (USDEd) to *“maintain adequate substantive change policies that ensure that any substantive change to the educational mission, program or programs of an institution after the agency has accredited ... the institution does not adversely affect the capacity of the institution to continue to meet the agency’s standards.”*<sup>2</sup>

Failure to report these and other planned substantive changes (described in the table below) can result in loss of institutional accreditation. For that reason, and to preclude the possibility of the quality of programs being called into question, the following procedures for recognizing and reporting substantive change are established.

The administrative heads of both academic and non-academic units are responsible for being attentive to what SACSCOC considers a *“significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution”* and for being aware of related information resources concerning accreditation (see <http://www.sacscoc.org>).

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<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Standard (CS) CS 3.12.1 The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the Commission’s substantive change policy, and, when required, seeks approval prior to the initiation of changes. (See Commission policy *“Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions.”*)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Printing Office, 34 CFR Ch. VI (7–1–10 Edition), § 602.22 Substantive change. (as published in 64 FR 56617, Oct. 20, 1999, as amended at 74 FR 55428, Oct. 27, 2009) from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2010-title34-vol3/pdf/CFR-2010-title34-vol3-sec602-22.pdf>, viewed on December 18, 2012

It is the duty of the provost, vice chancellors, deans, heads, directors, and like administrators to ensure that the university's SACSCOC Liaison is notified of planning for a modification that may prove substantive and that the Chancellor be informed of the determination of its status as soon as possible. Implementation of a change that clearly is or may be substantive cannot occur until the university notifies SACSCOC of its intention and receives approval.

Substantive changes can be addressed in several ways. In the SACSCOC substantive change policy (available at <http://www.sacscoc.org/SubstantiveChange.asp>), the approach is based on reporting requirements, i.e., notification only or notification and approval or required before implementation of a substantive change. While this is convenient for a regulatory entity, a university is more likely to consider such changes from an organizational level approach such as (1) Program/Course Level, (2) School/College/Department Level, and (3) Institutional Level.

## Types of Substantive Changes

### Program/Course Level:

1. Initiating coursework or programs at a different level than currently approved;
2. Expanding at current degree level or developing a new general education program (*significant departure from current programs*);
3. Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice;
4. Initiating other certificate programs;
5. Initiating joint or dual degrees<sup>3</sup> with another institution;
6. Altering significantly the length of a program;
7. Initiating degree completion programs;
8. Closing an academic program (requires a teach-out plan);
9. Closing an approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution (requires a teach-out plan for any affected programs at the site)
10. Adding a combination degree program that reduces the hours needed to complete the combined degree (e.g., combination baccalaureate and master's degree; see Interpretation of Core Requirement 2.7.1 Program Length available at [http://www.sacscoc.org/inst\\_forms\\_and\\_info1.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/inst_forms_and_info1.asp) in the section Interpretations to the *Principles of Accreditation* as approved by the SACS COC Board of Trustees)

#### *Examples of Program / Course Level Change:*

- ✓ The closure of the College of Social Work office and program in Memphis
- ✓ Closing a graduate certificate programs which requires a teach-out plan

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<sup>3</sup> SACSCOC defines a **Dual Degree Program** as separate program completion credentials each of which bears only the name, seal, and signature of the institution awarding the degree to the student; and a **Joint Degree Program** as a single program completion credential bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the two or more institutions awarding the degree to the student. See SACSCOC Policy [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#)

**School/College/Department Level:**

- 11. Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School programs offered at the high school);
- 12. Initiating distance learning (for the first time)<sup>4</sup>;
- 13. Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium;
- 14. Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs;

*Example of School / College / Department Level Change:*  
Entering into a consortial arrangement with an international university for the delivery of educational programming

**Institutional Level:**

- 15. Initiating a branch campus;
- 16. Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution;
- 17. Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution;
- 18. Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution;
- 19. Relocating a main or branch campus;
- 20. Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographical area);
- 21. Changing from clock hours to credit hours;
- 22. Acquiring any program or site from another institution;
- 23. Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing;

*Example of Institutional Level Change:* Change of reporting line for the Athletic Director from the University System President to the UT Chancellor.

Some substantial changes may never occur; however, we are required to be aware of them and address them in policy.

**Substantial changes that relate to current and proposed academic programs are included in the guidelines for curricular submissions prepared by the [Undergraduate](#) and [Graduate](#) Councils for units to follow** (guidelines are available at the Councils' websites). Units must consult these documents when considering significant changes to academic programs.

SACSCOC's specifications of time lines for notification and means of requesting approval appear in the tables below.

SACSCOC issues revisions to their Substantive Change Policy typically in January and June following the actions of the Board of Trustees. The UT SACSCOC Liaison regularly reviews the UT policy to ensure it conforms to the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy, which is available at <http://www.sacscoc.org/SubstantiveChange.asp>. Notification of updates to the UT Substantive Change Policy will be distributed by the university's SACSCOC Liaison to all vice chancellors, deans, and heads through appropriate channels.

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<sup>4</sup> UT was first authorized to offer distance learning programs February 12, 1998.

Tables for the various substantive changes requiring notification to SACSCOC or approval from SACSCOC prior to implementation. Always consult with the SACSCOC Liaison who will have more detailed information regarding any substantive change documentation required by SACSCOC.

### Procedure 1 Changes

Require approval prior to implementation; includes a Prospectus (similar to a THEC proposal) and possibly a site visit. Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison for details on preparing the documentation.

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Initiating coursework or programs at a different level than currently approved	Procedure 1 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	No	Yes	Application for Level Change Due dates: March 15 (for June review) September 1 (for December review)
Initiating off-campus sites where student can obtain 50% or more credits toward a program (including but not limited to Early College High School, dual enrollment programs offered at a high school, and certificate programs that are not at employer’s request and not on short notice)	Procedure 1 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	No	Yes	Cover Sheet Prospectus  Due dates: January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation
Expanding at current degree level (significant departure from current programs). <sup>5</sup>				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off- campus sites by adding programs that ARE significantly different from current programs at the site AND at the institution				
Initiating degree completion programs				
Initiating a branch campus <sup>6</sup>				
Initiating distance learning by offering 50% or more of the first program for the first time <sup>7</sup>				
Relocating a main or branch campus				

<sup>5</sup> Significant departure includes number of faculty, new courses, learning resources, equipment and facilities, and other funded requirements

<sup>6</sup> **Branch campus** as defined by SACS COC: 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: permanent in nature; offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

<sup>7</sup> UT was first authorized to offer distance learning programs February 12, 1998.

Types of Change	Procedure or Policy	Prior Notification Required	Prior Approval Required	Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC
Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides 25% or more of an educational program offered by the SACSCOC accredited institution	Procedure 1 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	No	Yes	Cover Sheet Prospectus  Due dates: January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation
Initiating a certificate program at a new off-campus site at employer's request and on short notice (previously approved program)	Procedure 1 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	No	Yes	Cover Sheet Modified prospectus Contact Commission Staff.
Initiating a certificate program that is a significant departure from previously approved programs at employer's request and on short notice				
Adding a site under a U.S. military contract for a previously approved program				
Altering significantly the length of a program				
Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution <sup>8</sup>				
Changing from clock hours to credit hours	Procedure 1 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	No	Yes	Justify reasons for change, indicate calculation of equivalency, and other pertinent information
Initiating a direct assessment competency-based program	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs</a>	Yes – Screening Form	Yes	Submit "Screening Form" with letter of notification. If Prospectus is required, Due dates: March 15 (for June review) September 1 (for December review)

<sup>8</sup> Significant changes in mission are those that lead to a fundamental shift in the nature of the institution. Editorial changes in the language of a mission statement are not substantive and need not be reported.

<i>Types of Change</i>	<i>Procedure or Policy</i>	<i>Prior Notification Required</i>	<i>Prior Approval Required</i>	<i>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</i>
Initiating a merger / consolidation with another institution	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Mergers, Consolidations, Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status</a>	Yes – at least 6 months before review date	Yes	Cover Sheet, Institutional Summary Form, Prospectus (See Appendix in SACSCOC Policy)  Due dates: March 15 (for June review); September 1 (for December review)
Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution				
Acquiring any program or site from another institution				
Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing				

## Procedure 2 Substantive Changes

These require only notification prior to implementation. Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison for details on preparing the documentation.

<i>Types of Change</i>	<i>Procedure or Policy</i>	<i>Prior Notification Required</i>	<i>Prior Approval Required</i>	<i>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</i>
Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographic area)	Procedure 2 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	Yes	No	Letter of notification with old address, new address, and implementation date
Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium	Procedure 2 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	Yes	No	Letter of notification and copy of signed agreement
Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides less than 25% of an educational program offered by the SACSCOC accredited institution				
Initiating off-campus sites where student can obtain 25- 49% of credits toward a program (including but not limited to Early College High School, dual enrollment programs offered at a high school, and certificate programs that are not at employer’s request and not on short notice)	Procedure 2 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	Yes	No	Letter of notification Including street address and implementation date
Initiating distance learning by offering 25-49 of the first program for the first time <sup>9</sup>				

<sup>9</sup> UT was first authorized to offer distance learning programs February 12, 1998.

### Procedure 3 Substantive Changes

Requires teach-out plans and/or teach-out agreements. Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison for details on preparing the documentation.

<i>Types of Change</i>	<i>Procedure or Policy</i>	<i>Prior Notification Required</i>	<i>Prior Approval Required</i>	<i>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</i>
Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution where the institution plans to teach out its own students	Procedure 3 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	Yes	Yes	Description of teach-out plan included with letter of notification
Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution where the institution plans contracts with another institution(s) to teach-out students (Teach-out Agreement)	Procedure 3 (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison)	Yes	Yes	Description of teach-out plan, copy of signed teach-out agreement(s) detailing terms included with notification

### Joint and Dual Degrees

Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison for details on preparing the documentation.

<i>Types of Change</i>	<i>Procedure or Policy</i>	<i>Prior Notification Required</i>	<i>Prior Approval Required</i>	<i>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</i>
Initiating dual or joint degrees involving program expansion (significant departure) or initiating a new site where student can obtain 50% or more credits toward a program	See SACSCOC policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	No	Yes	Cover Sheet, Prospectus (Contact the campus SACS COC Liaison) Due dates: January 1 for 7/1-12/31 implementation July 1 for 1/1-6/30 implementation Copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution, and additional details on non-SACSCOC institution(s) involved. See Policy
Initiating dual or joint degree with at least one institution <u>not</u> accredited by SACSCOC	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	At least 6 months prior to implementation	Yes	Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement, contact information for each institution, and additional details on non-SACSCOC institution(s). See Policy.
Initiating dual or joint degrees with other SACSCOC accredited institution(s)	See SACSCOC Policy <a href="#">Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards</a>	At least 6 months prior to implementation	No	Acceptance of notification, copy of signed agreement and contact information for each institution. See Policy.

## Non-Substantive Changes

<i>Types of Change</i>	<i>Procedure or Policy</i>	<i>Prior Notification Required</i>	<i>Prior Approval Required</i>	<i>Documentation and Time Frame for Contacting SACSCOC</i>
Initiating a certificate program at employer's request and on short notice using existing approved courses and location	NA	No	No	NA
Initiating certificate program (not at employer's request and not on short notice) using existing approved courses and location				
Initiating off-campus sites (including Early College High School and dual enrollment programs offered at the high school) where student can obtain 24% or less of credits toward a program				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off- campus sites by adding approved programs that ARE NOT significantly different from current programs at the site				
Expanding program offerings at previously approved off- campus sites by adding approved programs that ARE significantly different from current programs at the site but NOT at the institution				
Initiating distance learning by offering 24% or less of any program for the first time <sup>10</sup>				

### **Policy version history:**

Original: December 19, 2012

Revised: March 1, 2013

Revised: September 23, 2014 to take into account: 1) issuance of a new statement *Core Requirement 2.7.1 Interpretation* (combined baccalaureate and Master's programs); 2) changes to reporting on certificate programs; and 3) revised documentation required when entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in US DOE Title IV programs

Revised: May 20, 2016 to take into account the revisions to SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy dated March 2016: 1) organization of changes by type of procedure required for reporting to SACSCOC; 2) removal of reference to statement *Core Requirement 2.7.1 Interpretation* (combined baccalaureate and Master's programs) since the statement was retracted.

<sup>10</sup> UT was first authorized to offer distance learning programs February 12, 1998.