



# TECHNICAL COLLEGE OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

## PROCEDURE 310.10

### SACSCOC Accreditation – Substantive Change

**Department Responsibility:** Academic Affairs

**Related Policy:** AA-312

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**PRESIDENT SIGNATURE**

**February 14, 2023**

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**DATE APPROVED**

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## PURPOSE

This procedure outlines the notification process the College must follow to be in compliance with the Substantive Change requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The full description of the requirements can be found on the [SACSCOC website](#).

## PROCEDURE

### Compliance Expectations

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. The following is excerpted from the [SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#).

Substantive changes, including those required by federal regulations, include:

- 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 credentials).



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- 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.
- 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. An agreement offering more than 50% of one or more of an institution's programs is prohibited by federal regulation.
- Substantially increasing 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 following list enumerates additional substantive change requirements, including those required by federal regulations:

- An institution is required to notify or secure SACSCOC approval prior to implementing a substantive change.
- An institution is responsible for maintaining compliance at all times with Standard 14.2 (*Substantive change*) of the *Principles of Accreditation* and with the *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* and related policies, viz., *Advertising and Student Recruitment; Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards; Credit Hours; Direct Assessment Competency-based Educational Programs; Distance and Correspondence Education; Dual Enrollment; Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of*



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*Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status; and Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level.*

- An institution is required to have a written substantive change policy and procedure. It must be approved through institutional processes and published in institutional documents accessible to those affected. The purpose of the institution's substantive change policy and procedure is to ensure all substantive changes are reported to SACSCOC in a timely fashion as required by Substantive Change Policy and Procedures. Institutions are responsible for implementing and enforcing their substantive change policy and procedure.
- An institution's fiscal and administrative capability to operate off-campus instructional sites is assessed when a new site is reviewed for approval and as part of decennial and fifth year interim reviews.
- A new off-campus instructional site is subject to a substantive change committee visit. A committee visit, when necessary, is authorized when a site is approved. The committee visit ensures the site has the personnel, facilities, and resources identified by an institution in its application or prospectus and ensures the quality of instructional and support services offered at the site.

Different or additional requirements apply to an institution on Substantive Change Restriction. Restriction applies if an institution has been placed on Warning, Probation, or Probation for Good Cause over the prior three academic years, or if an institution is under provisional certification for participation in federal financial aid programs. An institution is required to submit an institutional contingency teach-out plan to SACSCOC within 30 days of notification if the institution is placed or continued on Probation or Probation for Good Cause, or if the institution meets conditions enumerated in the procedures section of this policy originating from the U.S. Department of Education or state authority.

### **Responsibilities**

- **TCL SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison**
  - Monitors the various types of institutional actions that may trigger a required substantive change notification by maintaining communication with the College deans, vice presidents, and other relevant parties.
  - Serves on the College's Curriculum Committee in an ex officio capacity to maintain awareness of curriculum changes.
  - Keeps abreast of changes to SACSCOC's policies and procedures by attending SACSCOC events and reading communication from SACSCOC. Communicates any changes to the relevant parties at the College.
  - Submits notifications, prospectuses, and other required documentation for approval by SACSCOC.
  - Submits substantive change invoices to Business Office for payment.



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- Communicates substantive change-related questions to relevant SACSCOC vice presidents.
- Informs relevant parties at the College when a substantive change has been approved by SACSCOC.
  
- **Academic Deans and Vice Presidents**
  - Support the TCL SACSCOC Liaison by reporting any potential substantive changes prior to implementation and within enough time to obtain approval from SACSCOC when required.
  - Assist the TCL SACSCOC Liaison in determining whether a change is substantive, based on SACSCOC policies and procedures.
  - As needed, provide information for substantive changes to the SACSCOC liaison, particularly for new programs or offsite instructional locations.
  
- **Faculty**
  - Work with division deans to report any potential substantive changes prior to implementation and within enough time to obtain approval from SACSCOC when required.
  - As needed, provide information for substantive changes to the SACSCOC liaison, particularly for new programs.

### **Deadlines for Submission and Implementation**

The following timelines apply to the most common types of substantive changes. For information about all SACSCOC substantive changes, see the [SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#).

- **New Program Notification and Approval**
  - Notification (program with 25 to 49% new content): Submit notification prior to implementation.
  - Approval (program with 50% or more new content): Submit substantive change prospectus by the following dates:
    - Program intended to begin January – June: Submit by July 1 of the previous calendar year.
    - Program intended to begin July-December: Submit by January 1 of the same calendar year.
  
- **New Off-Campus Instructional Site (OCIS) Notification and Approval**
  - Notification (OCIS at which 25-49% of a program's instruction is delivered): Submit notification prior to implementation.



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- Instruction at a site may cross the 25% notification threshold any time after the institution submits notification; the institution does not have to wait for a SACSCOC response to implement.
- Approval (OCIS at which 50% or more of a program's instruction is delivered):
  - First two sites for which approval is sought following January 1, 2021 must go through an **extensive review process**. An extensive review prospectus addressing institution-level and site-level readiness must be submitted by the following dates:
    - Site intended to offer 50% or more of a program beginning January – June: Submit by September 1 of the previous calendar year for review at the Board's biannual meeting in December.
    - Site intended to offer 50% or more of a program beginning July – December: Submit by March 15 of the same calendar year for review at the Board's biannual meeting in June of the same calendar year.
  - After two sites have been approved through the extensive review process, a **limited review process** is used for subsequent sites, in which a prospectus addressing the site must be submitted by the following dates:
    - OCIS intended to open January – June: Submit by July 1 of the previous calendar year.
    - OCIS intended to open July-December: Submit by January 1 of the same calendar year.
- **Program Closure**
  - Closing a program requires the institution to submit a teach-out plan for SACSCOC approval.
  - Closure is defined as closed to admission or entry, not the cessation of instruction; i.e., closure date is when students can no longer start, not the date instruction ends. Closure approval ensures the institution has a plan and process to provide students reasonable completion options that minimize disruption and additional costs.
  - Because closure approval is approval of the teach-out process, not the closure per se (i.e., not after the fact), **a teach-out plan should be submitted as soon as possible after the decision is made to close.**
  - Program closure includes ending a program at all locations or by all methods of delivery, but also includes ending a student's completion option at a specific location or by a specific method of delivery. Therefore, program closure approval is required if a program closes
    - at a location (on-campus or off-campus instructional site) but continues to be offered at other locations, or
    - by a method of delivery but continues to be offered by other methods of delivery.



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- Program closure is not required for a specialization, pathway, or minor embedded within a discipline-specific program.
- Because time is of the essence – to provide students maximum time to consider and adapt to alternate completion plans – an institution may generally begin a program teach-out plan after it has been submitted to SACSCOC for approval.
- **Off-campus instructional site (OCIS) closure**
  - Closing an off-campus instructional site requires SACSCOC approval (for both notified and approved sites). All closure approvals require an acceptable teach-out plan.
  - For SACSCOC, a site is considered closed as of the date the institution stops admitting students to the site; closure is not the date of last instruction.
  - Because closure approval is for the teach-out process, not the closure per se (i.e., not after the fact), **a teach-out plan should be submitted as soon as possible after the decision is made to close. Institutional, system, or state definitions of closure must be reconciled by the institution with the SACSCOC definition.**
  - If a program will no longer be offered at a site but the site will remain open for other programs, see program closure approval requirements under Program Closure.
  - A teach-out plan is due to SACSCOC as soon as possible after the institution decides to close a site. Because time is of the essence – to provide students maximum time to consider and adapt to alternate completion plans – an institution may generally begin a site teach-out plan after it has been submitted to SACSCOC for approval. Although the institution may begin a teach-out immediately after submitting it, the closure is not approved until action is taken by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Starting and completing a teach-out plan before securing SACSCOC Board approval does not relieve the institution of its obligation to provide an acceptable teach-out plan.