

UT Health Science Center: AA116-H UTHSC Substantive Change Policy	
Version 2	Publication Date: 06/30/2025

No./Title: AA116 – SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY	Resp. Office: Institutional Effectiveness	Effective Date: 05/01/2018
Category: Academic	Last Review: 08/06/2024	Next Review: 08/06/2027
Contact: Office of Institutional Effectiveness	☎ 901.448.9695	✉ oie@uthsc.edu

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to establish institutional procedures for recognizing and approving substantive change and ensuring timely notification to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The University's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is the individual responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.

The types of substantive change and the procedures for reporting them to SACSCOC are found in the SACSCOC policy statement <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>. If differences occur between this institutional policy and the SACSCOC policy, the SACSCOC policy has precedence.

DEFINITIONS

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

The SACSCOC is the recognized regional accrediting body in the 11 U.S. southern states and in Latin America for those institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees. The SACSCOC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an agency whose accreditation enables its member institutions to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV programs. To maintain its recognition by the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission has incorporated federal requirements into its substantive change policy and procedures. Some of those requirements expect an institution to seek and receive approval prior to the initiation of a substantive change so that the change can be included in the institution's scope of accreditation.

Substantive Change

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution, as defined in SACSCOC's substantive change policy. The types of substantive change and the procedures for addressing them are found in the policy and on the SACSCOC substantive change website (<https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/>).

Notification

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Notification to the SACSCOC regarding substantive change means the CEO of the institution, or designee, shall send a letter to the President of the SACSCOC summarizing the proposed change, providing the intended implementation date, and listing the complete physical address if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site or branch campus.

Prospectus

A prospectus is a concisely worded narrative that describes a proposed substantive change according to a format specified by the SACSCOC.

Accreditation Liaison

The accreditation liaison is the individual appointed by the CEO of the institution to help ensure the institution remains in compliance with SACSCOC accreditation requirements and policies. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness is UTHSC's accreditation liaison.

Branch Campus

A branch campus is 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.

Off-Campus Site

An off-campus site is a location of an institution that is geographically part, but not independent, of the main campus. The site may be used in an ongoing manner to deliver programs or courses leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential, but it does not have its own faculty, administrative organization, or budget.

Distance Education

Distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and between students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMS if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

Significant Departure

A significant departure is when a program is not closely related to previously approved programs at the institution or site or for the mode of delivery in question. A new program with 50% to 100% new content

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is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs and requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A new program with 25% to 49% new content is also a significant departure and requires notification to SACSCOC prior to implementation.

PROCEDURES

SACSCOC requires prior notification for substantive changes, and in some cases prior approval by SACSCOC is necessary before changes can be implemented. Only the CEO (the Chancellor) and the Accreditation Liaison are authorized to submit substantive change notifications to SACSCOC (per SACSCOC policy). All internal approvals, including University of Tennessee System (UTS) and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) approvals where applicable, must be completed prior to action by SACSCOC (acknowledgement of notification or grant of approval).

Should SACSCOC require a prospectus, the deans or appropriate senior administrators will coordinate preparation of the prospectus and forward it to the Accreditation Liaison for review and submission.

The Accreditation Liaison shall inform all affected individuals at the university of the SACSCOC substantive change policy and this policy on a biannual basis. At the same time, the Accreditation Liaison will request notification of substantive changes in planning for the next 12-month period. Failure to notify the Accreditation Liaison of planned substantive changes may result in significant delays in the implementation of the changes.

Failure to comply with the substantive change policy, including failing to timely notify SACSCOC of a substantive change, can result in severe penalties for the institution.

EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

Substantive changes that require *prior approval* by SACSCOC include:

- Initiating coursework or programs at a higher or lower degree level than currently approved
- Expanding programs at currently approved levels when the new programs are significant departures
- Initiating a branch campus
- Initiating an off-campus site at which students can obtain 50% or more of the credits required for a degree program
- 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 institution
- Initiating joint or dual degree programs with another institution that is NOT SACSCOC accredited
- Acquiring any program from another institution
- Acquiring any site from another institution
- Closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus, or institution (note that SACSCOC considers a program closed when entry or admission is closed, not when instruction ceases). This includes

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ending a method of delivery of a program or a site where a program is delivered. The approval is of the teach-out plan, not the closure per se.

Substantive changes that require *prior notification* to SACSCOC include:

- Initiating an off-campus site at which students can obtain 25% to 49% of the credits required for a degree program
- Moving an off-campus instructional site (serving the same geographic area)
- 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 institution
- Initiating joint or dual degree programs with another institution that is SACSCOC accredited
- Adding a method of delivery to an existing program

Note that these lists are not exhaustive and other changes not listed may be considered substantive changes by SACSCOC. Further, certain changes that are not considered substantive by SACSCOC may nevertheless require prior approval by or notification to THEC and UTS.

Contact the AVC IEDS for more information about this policy and procedure.

APPROVAL HISTORY

Effective: May 1, 2018, Committee on Academic and Student Affairs (CASA) Chancellor

Approved: May 23, 2018

Reviewed: February 2, 2021, CASA

Approved: February 5, 2021, Chief Academic Officer



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Type of Change	THEC Notification?	THEC Approval?	Applicable THEC Policy
New academic program that is NOT a significant departure (i.e., does not rise to the level of a substantive change per SACSCOC policy)	Yes	YES	Academic Policy A1.0
Change or add a program degree designation (B.A. to B.F.A.; Ed.D. to Ph.D.) Note – may be subject to external review	Yes		Academic Policy A1.1
Establish a free-standing academic program from an existing concentration (conditions apply)	Yes		
Establish a new certificate program*	Yes	NO	Academic Policy A1.5
Program name change			
Concentration name change			
New concentration within existing program			
Change SCH of existing program*			
Consolidation of academic programs			
Extension of program to approved center			
Change of instructional delivery mode			



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Inactivation of program or concentration*			
Reactivation of program or concentration			
New academic units	Yes	Yes	Academic Policy A1.3
Reorganization of academic unit if one of the following occurs: net increase in number of academic units; existing academic unit will be placed at a higher organizational level; additional costs incurred; or significant change in the activity of the academic unit			

CHANGES REQUIRING THEC APPROVAL OR NOTIFICATION NOT LISTED ABOVE

Note – some changes (*) may constitute a substantive change and require SACSCOC notification and/or approval