

# 03.02.99.R0.03 Programmatic and Administrative Substantive Changes Approval Process (SACSCOC)



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Revised February 28, 2020  
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## Procedure Summary

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Texas A&M University-Commerce is responsible for compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) as a condition of its continued accreditation by SACSCOC. A&M-Commerce recognizes the importance of the commission's substantive change policy and understands that reporting and seeking approval prior to initiation of the change(s) is essential to ensure compliance with the policy and with federal regulations. The institution is committed to complying with the policy.

This procedure is intended to support the applicable SACSCOC policy statement in its most current form titled Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions and available at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org). This procedure fulfills the SACSCOC requirement that member institutions have a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported to the SACSCOC at the required time. Furthermore, this procedure identifies the process to be followed at this institution for handling substantive changes that can affect the university's accreditation. It identifies how such changes are communicated to the university's accrediting organization.

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## Procedures and Responsibilities

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### 1 GENERAL

- 1.1 Proponents of all academic changes are required to follow the procedures outlined in *03.02.99.R0.01 Academic Approval Procedure for Programs*. This procedure identifies the types of academic and administrative approvals that are required for developing and submitting program and curriculum changes. This procedure also identifies the steps required to obtain approvals from the various faculty committees, Faculty Senate and administration, before the submission is sent to The Texas A&M University System and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
- 1.2 The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison (see *Accreditation Liaison*) is the individual appointed by the President to help ensure the University remains in compliance with SACSCOC accreditation requirements and policies. The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is responsible for coordinating and reporting substantive changes to the Commission on Colleges.

The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will utilize the university curriculum review cycle to identify substantive changes related to the addition, deletion, or modification of courses and degree programs.

- 1.3 The current *SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy* with a glossary of definitions, various procedures, and parameters for the prospectus is available at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org); however, the document is lengthy and complex to interpret. Colleges who are proposing a program development, delivery, or change and are proposing curriculum development and change are required to seek guidance early in the process from the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison, in order to determine if a prospectus must be submitted and/or notification made for prior approval by SACSCOC.
- 1.4 These processes can take extensive time. Program or curriculum changes, which require a prospectus, must be submitted six or more months prior to expected implementation. A prospectus can take up to four months to write and revise. Further, the SACSCOC approval process can require an on-site visit by a SACSCOC Committee to evaluate the proposed change prior to approval. If the program or curriculum change is one that requires SACSCOC approval, and approval has not been received by the University, the program or curriculum change will not be marketed nor implemented until the approval letter from SACSCOC is received in the President's Office.
- 1.5 In addition to the time needed for communicating approvals, implementation as well as inclusion in the university's catalog can be substantial, especially if the annual publishing cycle is missed.
- 1.6 Therefore, since many academic changes might be considered substantive change by SACSCOC, up to 18 months of lead-time is recommended.
- 1.7 Upon final approval of the required documents by the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison, it is the responsibility of the President to inform the SACSCOC President of substantive changes.
- 1.8 This procedure will be reviewed annually by the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison in an Executive Leadership Team meeting. Modifications to this procedure will be recommended as warranted.

## 2 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 The Provost as well as associate/assistant provosts, vice presidents, deans, department heads, and directors have the fundamental responsibility to be generally aware of the types of changes which could be considered substantive; ask questions of the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison; inform the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison at the earliest point possible of proposals that might be considered a substantive change for the University; and provide any data, information, and/or prospectus necessary to comply with SACSCOC as applicable.

- 2.2 If it is discovered that a program considered a substantive change has been implemented without SACSCOC prior notification, as required, the university administrator (e.g. Provost, dean, department head, et al.) must notify the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison who, after researching the specifics of the matter, will immediately take the required steps for notification to SACSCOC.
- 2.3 In instances where practices of programs suspected to be out of compliance with this procedure or with SACSCOC policies or *Principles of Accreditation*, the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will bring it to the attention of the Provost and the President for timely resolution.
- 2.4 The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will be responsible for communicating the submissions to and responses from SACSCOC to the university community.
- 2.5 The Department of Institutional Effectiveness and Research will be responsible for maintaining a web page of official notifications and approvals from SACSCOC regarding substantive changes and for maintaining an up-to-date, comprehensive inventory showing the status of program and curriculum submissions, changes, and approvals by the A&M System and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

### 3 COMPLIANCE AND PENALTIES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

- 3.1 Failure to comply with this policy and procedure can result in penalties of varying degrees of seriousness. *Substantive Change of SACSCOC Accredited Institutions* policy statement explains one of the possible penalties: “if an institution fails to follow SACSCOC substantive change policy and procedures, it may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money received by the institution for programs related to the unreported substantive change. In addition, the institution’s case may be referred to SACSCOC Board of Trustees for the imposition of a sanction or for removal from membership (page 13).”

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## Related Statutes, Policies, or Requirements

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Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC),  
[The http://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf](http://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf)

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC),  
[Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions](#)

Texas Administrative Code, [Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter Q, Rule 4.274](#)

Texas Administrative Code, [Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter P, Rule 4.259](#)

The Texas A&M University System [Program/Administrative Approval Submission Guidelines](#)

System Policy [11.10, Academic Program Requests](#)

## Definitions

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Substantive change is defined by SACSCOC as “a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution.” In addition, under federal regulations, substantive change includes:

- Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution
- Any change in legal status, form of control, ownership of the institution
- The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, either in content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated
- The addition of courses or programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution’s current accreditation or reaffirmation
- A change from clock hours to credit hours
- A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program
- The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program
- The establishment of a branch campus
- Closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus or institution
- Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement that includes only the initiation of a dual or joint academic program with another institution
- Acquiring another institution or a program or location of another institution
- Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out program for a closed institution.
- Entering into a contract by which an entity not eligible for Title IV funding offers 25% or more of one or more of the accredited institution’s programs

SACSCOC also reserves the right to identify other changes as substantive.

For a complete glossary of definitions, see the Substantive Changes for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions policy statement at [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

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## Contact Office

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