SACSCOC and UK Substantive Change Policy:

A Brief Training
Updated February, 2014
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

- SACSCOC, founded in 1895, is the regional body for accreditation of higher education institutions in the southern states.
- UK has been a SACSCOC accredited institution since 1915.
- UK’s last accreditation site visit was in April 2012. Reaffirmation was announced at the December 2013 SACSCOC annual meeting.
- Compliance with “Substantive Change” policy is now a comprehensive standard for reaffirmation of accreditation.
- SACSCOC Substantive Change policy was revised in 2013 in response to changes in requirements by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE).
SACS Commission on Colleges

- 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.
- SACSCOC 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 and thus receive federal funds.
To maintain its recognition by the 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.

To gain or maintain accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must comply with the standards contained in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement.
What is Substantive Change?

SACSCOC defines Substantive change: any significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution.
Types of Substantive Changes

- 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
- Establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. Approvals for new sites are for a maximum of 5 years, after which they must be reviewed again (at fifth-year or decennial review)
- Establishment of a branch campus
A prospectus is a concisely worded narrative that describes a proposed substantive change according to a format specified by the SACSCOC.

The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is the individual appointed by the President of the University to help ensure the University remains in compliance with SACS accreditation requirements and policies. Associate Provost Gene T. Lineberry is currently the SACSCOC Liaison for the University of Kentucky.
Distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place (internet, audio, video, computer technologies, and so forth).
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. To determine if a new program is a significant departure, it is helpful to ask if the new program requires a 25% change:

- New faculty?
- Many new courses?
- New library or other learning resources?
- New equipment or facilities?
- A new resource base?
UK’s Substantive Change Procedure

- Approval authority relating to each type of substantive change shall occur at various levels of the University. See the matrix in UK’s Substantive Change Policy that depicts approval authority for the following:
  - Expanding degree programs in a way that would be a significant departure from current programs
  - Initiating degree programs at a lower level
  - Initiating off-campus sites where 25% or more of degree is offered
  - Adding significantly different degree programs at an approved site
  - Initiating distance learning where 25% or more of degree is offered
  - Initiating degree programs/courses through contractual agreement
  - Altering significantly the length of a degree program
  - Initiating completer degree programs
  - Closing a degree program
  - Initiating teach-out agreements within UK or with another institution
  - Initiating a branch campus
  - Initiating a merger/consolidation
  - Relocating a campus
  - Changing governance, ownership, control or legal status of the institution
  - Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution
  - Closing the institution
UK’s Substantive Change Procedure

- In accordance with its academic approval responsibilities as established in GR IV.C.1, Page IV–2, the University Senate shall maintain academic program approval procedures and forms that:
  1. Recognize substantive changes related to academic programs in appropriate approval documents. These documents shall accompany the proposal at each step;
  2. Require approval by the appropriate educational unit faculties and also include any recommendations offered by the corresponding department chair, dean, and/or Provost prior to approval of academic substantive change by the Councils of the University Senate and the University Senate and
  3. Provide for timely notification to the SACSCOC prior to change implementation, as required by the SACSCOC substantive change policy.
UK’s Substantive Change Procedure

- The individuals and units that play a role in implementing the academic substantive change procedures include:
  - University Senate
  - University Senate Councils: Undergraduate, Graduate, and Health Care
  - Educational Unit Faculties
  - Educational Unit Administrators
  - UK SACSCOC Liaison—Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Frequently Asked Questions (from SACS Substantive Change FAQs)

- Why is SACS interested in changes that are occurring at institutions that are already accredited?
  - SACSCOC **accredits the entire institution**, including all of its programs and services, whenever they are located or however they are delivered. The Commission is interested in significant changes that are occurring because the scope of accreditation extends to the total university.
Frequently Asked Questions (from SACS Substantive Change FAQs)

- **What are the most common substantive changes that are reported?**
  - new off-campus sites where greater than 50% or more of the credits in a degree program are offered;
  - significant growth in distance education, including 50% or more of an educational program delivered via technology-based instruction; and
  - the addition of new site-based programs that are significantly different from current offerings.
Frequently Asked Questions (from SACS Substantive Change FAQs)

- We started offering a few online courses several years ago. Now it appears that students can complete a majority of their program online although that was not intended when we started. Do we have to report this?

Yes, when an institution initiates a program leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate in which 50% or more of the credits can be obtained by some form of distance learning, the institution should notify the SACSCOC of this development and submit a prospectus for approval. Subsequent programs in distance education do not need to be reported unless they represent significant departures from previously approved programs or new modes of delivery.
UK’s Substantive Change Procedure

- If a prospectus is subsequently required by the SACSCOC, the deans or appropriate senior administrators shall coordinate preparation of the prospectus and forward the prospectus to the Accreditation Liaison for final review.

- The Accreditation Liaison shall review a required prospectus and obtain approval of the President and the Provost before planning for submission to SACSCOC by the President.
A local business has asked us to offer the MBA degree at their facility for a specific target audience. Is this considered a substantive change?

Yes, the guidelines are the same whether a single cohort or a continuous program will be offered. When an institution establishes an off-campus site at which 50% or more of the credits in a program can be obtained, a prospectus should be submitted 3 months prior to the start date.
At the present time, we offer a master’s degree in political science. Do we need to notify SACS if we plan to begin a doctorate in political science? Our institution has doctoral degrees in education and religion.

Yes, the doctorate in political science is considered significantly different from the existing doctoral degrees in education and religion. The institution should notify the COC at least 6 months before starting the program and submit a prospectus to justify the new doctoral program at least 3 months prior to implementation.
What must we do if our institution has implemented programs that should have been reported?

An institution that has implemented programs that should have been reported must notify the President of the Commission immediately in writing concerning the unreported substantive changes. Please see the Commission’s policy on Unreported Substantive Change.
Our college is interested in reconfiguring existing courses in an approved program to create a new degree. Is this considered substantive to SACS?

In most cases, the re-packaging of existing courses does not constitute a substantive change.
Frequently Asked Questions (from SACS Substantive Change FAQs)

- Do we need to report collaborative programs with foreign institutions or consortia with institutions in our system?

- If the institution is establishing a contractual agreement with another institution to offer credit instruction leading to a diploma, certificate or degree, a letter of notification should be sent to the Commission as well as a signed copy of the written agreement.
Do new continuing education programs need to be reported?

If these new programs involve *credit instruction*, they should be reported in keeping with the substantive change policy. Non-credit programs that do not qualify for federal aid do not constitute substantive changes.
For additional information or questions, please contact:

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