



Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
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August 3, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Executive Officers of SACSCOC Institutions
CC: Accreditation Liaisons
FROM: Belle S. Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
RE: SACSCOC Updates & Information

I. Principles Review Committee

As you know from my earlier emails, the Principles Review Committee is hard at work on your behalf reviewing the current standards and considering feedback from institutions and the public regarding future proposed revisions. The posted surveys generated comments from over 425 institutions and I can guarantee you that all are being considered by the Committee. Because of the upcoming proposed changes that will be vetted with the membership in early 2017, and a final proposal for vote by the membership during the SACSCOC Annual Meeting in December 2017, there have been only a few policy changes proposed to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees recently for approval.

II. Executive Council and SACSCOC Board Actions

The following changes were approved in December 2015, March 2016, and June 2016 by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and Executive Council which affect institutions:

A. Substantive Change

1. New fee structure. The following changes to the fee structure for substantive change submissions will become effective January 1, 2017:
 - For prospectuses involving multiple institutions, the fee for review will be \$500 for each SACSCOC institution.
 - For prospectuses that involve non-SACSCOC institutions, the fee will be \$500 per SACSCOC institution, plus \$7,500 for each non-SACSCOC institution. (See especially: Substantive Change Policy and Mergers/Consolidations/Acquisitions Policy.)



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2. Revised Due Dates. The due dates for institutions submitting a prospectus or an application seeking approval of a substantive change have been modified which will become effective January 1, 2017:

◇ Proposals reviewed by staff and approved by the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees (most approvals involving sites and programs):

- January 1 for implementation between July 1 – December 31
- July 1 for implementation between January 1 – June 30 of following year

◇ Proposals requiring SACSCOC Board review and approval (Mergers, Change in Governance, Institutions on Sanction, Level Changes, etc.):

- March 15 – for June review by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees
- September 1 – for December review by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees

3. Changes to Guidelines for Substantive Change Submissions

- Commission staff have developed a "Cover Sheet for Submission of Substantive Changes Requiring Approval." Please complete and attach the [cover sheet](#) to each prospectus or Application for Level Change submitted.
- New guidelines for developing and submitting a prospectus have been developed and are included in the "Procedures" section of the [Substantive Change Policy](#). Please also see the updated table of substantive changes and procedures for reporting them on pp. 6-10 of the Policy.
- The Executive Council approved an abbreviated prospectus to be used by institutions seeking approval of new off-campus instructional sites offering programs for the U.S. military services. (See p. 16, item 5, of the Substantive Change Policy.)
- New [templates](#) for substantive change committee visits have been posted to the "Substantive Changes" tab on the SACSCOC website.

4. Reminders

- Prospectuses will not be accepted via email. In addition, all transmittals must include the required cover sheet and state the planned date of implementation.



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4. Reminders (cont.)

- An institution is expected to follow the reporting requirements of the Substantive Change Policy. Failure of an institution to gain approval for a substantive change involving programs that qualify for federal financial assistance could result in the institution jeopardizing such funding or having to reimburse the U.S. Department of Education for money received by the institution for programs initiated without approval by SACSCOC. (See [Institutional Responsibilities](#), p. 5.) In addition, the case will be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action.
- Commission polices are clear about when and how an institution may advertise a new program or site. The Substantive Change Policy (p. 17) states: "Once the prospectus has been submitted, the institution may advertise and recruit students to a new program or site as long as all materials clearly state that the program or site is pending approval by SACSCOC."
- Information about the fall 2016 [Substantive Change Workshops](#) has been posted on the SACSCOC website under the "Substantive Changes" tab. The two one-day Substantive Change Workshops will be held:
 - ◆ September 9, 2016, hosted by Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans, LA
 - ◆ October 28, 2016, hosted by Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, FL

Please visit the web link for the workshop learning objectives, intended audience, and online registration. Dr. Kevin Sightler, Coordinator of Substantive Change, will be the facilitator.

Registration is free, however, space is limited. Feel free to pass this along to others at your institution who may benefit from the workshop.

B. Mergers/Consolidations/Acquisitions Policy

The following statements have been added to the [Mergers/Acquisitions Policy](#):

- Page 6, #14: "If an institution has filed bankruptcy, SACSCOC will require any institution or organization purchasing the assets of the SACSCOC-accredited institution in bankruptcy to apply independently for accreditation."
- Page 8, #1, "In cases where the merged institutions, or the major component of the newly-merged institution, have successfully attained reaffirmation of accreditation within three years of SACSCOC Board approval of the merger, then the newly-merged institution will maintain the reaffirmation cycle of the major component."



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- Page 12, #9: "Provide a business plan that includes all of the following: a. a description of the financial transaction and the effect that the transaction has on the net assets of all the institutions involved. In addition, specifically provide details regarding each of the following: (1) liabilities, (2) transfer of assets, (3) future contractual obligations, (4) existing contracts, (5) charitable contributions generated or involved with the transaction, and (6) any other significant factor that will impact financial or physical resources."
- C. Review of Unsolicited Information. The SACSCOC Executive Council approved the creation of a separate policy for outlining its process for dealing with institutional information that becomes available to SACSCOC staff between cyclical reviews and that appears to call into question significant non-compliance of SACSCOC standards. Previously, the process was imbedded in the Standing Rules of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.
- D. Accreditation Procedures for Applicant Institutions. The changes to this document clarify the process for gaining initial membership in SACSCOC and makes clear that the separate accreditation of a unit of a current member institution follows a different policy
- E. Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution. The changes to this document explain the process when a unit of an existing member institution seeks separate accreditation from that institution. It also clarifies that the opposite situation may occur, where separately accredited member institutions lack sufficient autonomy to maintain separate accreditation.
- F. Dues, Fees and Expenses. The changes to this document include: the changes in fees for substantive change approvals involving multiple institutions, fees charged for Staff Advisory Visits, and fees associated with an off-site review. These changes also necessitated minor edits to the Substantive Change Policy, the Mergers/Acquisitions Policy, and others to maintain consistency in policies.

III. Other Items

- A. Actions by Office of Civil Rights. As many of you know, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has undergone a review of approximately 250 institutions for possible violations of the gender-equity law involving alleged sexual violence. The number of investigations has ballooned since mid-June 2011 when a "Dear Colleague" letter was sent to institutions outlining additional obligations in regard to complying with Title IX provisions.



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SACSCOC is not responsible for institutional compliance with Title IX; however, the *Principles of Accreditation* includes Comprehensive Standard 3.11.2, Institutional Environment, which states: "The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community." Because of this standard and its expectation that institutions take reasonable steps to ensure a safe environment, the Commission is requesting that institutions under investigation by the OCR due to possible violations of the gender-equity law involving sexual violence notify my office in writing and also include the correspondence between your institution and the OCR. I would appreciate your immediate attention to this if you are currently under investigation.

- B. Composition of SACSCOC Board of Trustees. This fall you will receive from my office a proposal developed by a study committee and approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at its meeting in June, that calls for a change in the composition of your elected 77-member Board of Trustees—the individuals you elect to represent the membership. Essentially, the change calls for reclassifications of representation on the Board by Tracks (Track A for undergraduate institutions and Track B for graduate institutions) rather than by degree levels. It recognizes the growing number of associate degree-granting institutions that are beginning to offer baccalaureate degrees, and the significant shift of institutions moving into doctoral programs.

- C. Legislative Brochure. In an effort to better educate legislators about the accreditation process, the Commission has had a brochure developed on accreditation. I am sending you (CEOs) three copies of the brochure and one copy is being sent to the House and Senate Education Committees in your state. If you would like to receive additional copies, please let me know.

I encourage you to check our website regularly, especially the page listing recent changes to the site. When there are significant changes, you will receive an email from my office calling those changes to your attention.

I truly hope you get some downtime this summer and that you have a productive academic year. I hope to see you in December at the SACSCOC Annual Meeting in Atlanta.