

## **Substantive Change Policy for Shenandoah University**

### **Policy Statement:**

To ensure compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges substantive change policy, Shenandoah University will inform the commission of changes in accordance with stated procedures and seek approval prior to the initiation of changes as applicable.

### **Purpose:**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges requires that each institution inform the Commission regarding substantive changes at the institution. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all substantive changes in the mission and academic programs, sites, and agreements of the University be reported in a timely manner and be approved by the Commission on Colleges when required before implementation. This policy establishes the procedures necessary to meet Commission requirements.

### **Applicable Principles:**

The SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation*, 2018 edition, *Section 14.2* states:

*The institution has a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported in accordance with SACSCOC policy.*

The *Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions Policy*, as updated June 2021, provides extensive details on when to submit Substantive Change notifications and documentation. The SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy forms the basis for all decisions regarding potential substantive changes, along with related institutional processes and timelines.

### **Definitions:**

Substantive Change is defined as “a significant modification or expansion in the nature and scope of an accredited institution”. Under federal regulations, substantive change may 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 credential).
- 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 increase 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.

Some changes require only written notification of Commission staff, while others may require the evaluation of a formal written request or even an on-site visit.

Closing an academic program, instructional site, branch campus or the university itself are also substantive changes, and typically require teach-out plans or teach-out agreements. The SACSCOC Good Practices document "Closing a Program, Site, Branch or Institution" outlines these particular procedures.

### **Institutional Process:**

Curriculum based substantive change

A department or academic unit that is considering any possible substantive change or program modification, including significant online program delivery or new degree programs, must discuss the required notification with their Dean/Director. The department or academic unit initiating the change should follow the institutional process for new program development as applicable. The University Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate oversees this process and reviews possible programmatic changes before forwarding to the SACSCOC liaison. As part of the program approval process the SACS liaison reviews the proposal and determines whether further steps are necessary. Any changes that are determined to require a substantive change must be approved by the Provost. Submission to SACSCOC must be made at least 6 months before the change is to go into effect. Depending on the specific change, more time may be needed. Many substantive changes require the preparation of a comprehensive prospectus according to a template provided by SACSCOC. Other changes may require only a notification letter from the university's representative to the President of the SACSCOC. The Provost and the SACSCOC Liaison handle all official communication with the SACSCOC office, including submission of notification letters and any prospectus.

To ensure that potential substantive change proposals do not go unreported, the SACSCOC Liaison works with the Provost and the Deans/Program Directors to perform a periodic audit of changes that may come under this policy.

#### Non-Curriculum based substantive change

Substantive changes that are not curriculum based should be initiated by the Deans/Vice Presidents in coordination with the SACSCOC liaison. Submission to SACSCOC must be made at least 6 months before the change is to go into effect. Depending on the specific change, more time may be needed. The Provost and SACSCOC Liaison will determine the necessary communication as outlined in the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and submit the necessary notification and/or prospectus.

#### **Dissemination:**

Per SACSCOC requirements, the substantive change policy is posted on the institution's website. In addition, the policy can be found on the Academic Affairs page within the student learning system (Canvas).

#### References:

SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/SubstantiveChange.pdf>

SACSCOC Good Practices Statement on Closing a Program, Site, Branch or Institution

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/CloseProgramSite.pdf>