



Policy Number: I.18  
Policy Level: Operating Policy  
Originally Issued: August 18, 2015  
Revised: October 2, 2017  
Revised: April 28, 2020  
Revised: May 31, 2022  
Revised: September 23, 2024  
Policy Owner: President  
Policy Implementation: SACSCOC Liaison  
**SACSCOC Standard: 14.2**

## Substantive Change Policy

### I. Policy Statement and Purpose

Athens State University is fully committed to complying with all policies and procedures mandated by the University's regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). This policy states the University's responsibilities for compliance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy.

### II. Substantive Change

The Commission on Colleges defines substantive change as a "significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. The reporting and review of substantive changes ensure that the scope of programs offered by the institution, as well as the structure and organization of the institution, have undergone appropriate review by SACSCOC".

Substantive changes may occur at any time and are not tied to, nor an integrated part of, the 10-Year Reaffirmation of Accreditation or of other reports due to the SACSCOC on a regular basis.

Athens State University is responsible for following the substantive change policy (and related policies) by informing SACSCOC of changes in accord with the stated procedures and, when required, seeking approval **prior** to initiating the change.

Failure to comply with the *SACS Substantive Change Policy* may carry severe consequences for the institution under Standard 14.2 of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, which states "If an institution fails to follow SACSCOC substantive change policies and procedures, it may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the US Department of Education to reimburse it for money it has received for programs related to the unreported substantive change.

A significant departure includes any program that is not closely related to previously approved programs at the institution or site or for the mode of delivery in question.



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Types of substantive change and required action:

Type of Substantive Change	Required Action to SACSCOC
Acquisition – the sale, exchange, or transfer of a component of an institution’s assets to a SACSCOC accredited institution.	Notification and Approval
Change in Measure of Student Progress to Completion – includes changes from or to semester, trimester, or quarters; time-based or non-time based measures; and clock hour-based or credit hour-based measures.	Approval
Competency-based Education by Course/Credit-based Approach	Approval
Distance Education – after the institution is approved to offer its first distance education program, additional programs in which 50% or more is earned through distance education are subject to new program approval if significant departure or notification is not a significant departure.	Notification OR Approval
Governance Change – includes significantly altering governing board bylaws, the board’s scope of authority or responsibility, the number of board members, or how board members are selected.	Notification AND Approval
Institution Closure	Approval
Institution Relocation	Approval
Institutional Contingency Teach-Out Plan	Approval
Level Change – initiating coursework or a program at a different level than previously approved or authorized by SACSCOC	Approval
Merger/Consolidation	Notification AND Approval
Mission Change	Approval
Prison Education Program (PEP)	Approval for the first program at the first two off-campus PEP sites.



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Ownership, Means of Control, or Legal Status Change	Notification AND Approval
Clock-Credit Hour Conversion	Approval
Competency-based Education by Direct Assessment	Approval – in which 50% or more of the program may be earned through the direct assessment approach to CBE. Notification – in which 25-49% of the program may be earned through the direct-assessment approach to CBE.
Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Title IV Entities	Notification
Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Non-Title IV Entities	Approval – An agreement with an entity not certified to participate in US Department of Education title IV programs to deliver 25-50% of a program’s content.  Notification – An agreement with an entity not certified to participate in US Department of Education title IV programs to deliver less than 25% of a program’s content.
Correspondence Education	Approval
Dual Academic Award	Notification
Joint Academic Award with non-SACSCOC Institution(s) or Entity(ies)	Approval
Joint Academic Award with SACSCOC Institution(s)	Notification
Method of Delivery	Notification
New Program – with 50-100% new content is a significant departure from the institution’s existing programs.	Approval – for 50-100% new content  Notification – for 25-49% new content
Program Closure – Closure is defined as closed to admission or entry	Approval
Program Designed for Prior Learning – initiating a program requiring students to possess prior learning as a condition of admission.	Notification



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Program Length Change	Approval
Program Re-Open – a closed program may reopen within five years of closure date.	Notification
Off Campus Instructional Site	Notification – site at which 25-49% of a program’s instruction is delivered.  Approval – site at which 50% or more of a program’s instruction is delivered.
Off Campus Instructional Site Relocation	Notification – Non-branch campus  Branch Campus – Approval  Name or Address Change – Notification
Off Campus Instructional Site	Closure – Approval  Re-Open – Notification

The Commission on Colleges provides the following questions as recommendations for consideration in determining whether a new program is a "significant departure".

- What previously approved programs does the institution offer that are closely related to the new program and how are they related?
- Will significant additional equipment or facilities be needed?
- Will significant additional financial resources be needed?
- Will a significant number of new courses be required?
- Will a significant number of new faculty members be required?
- Will significant additional library/learning resources be needed?

The SACSCOC accreditation liaison, appointed by the President, must be consulted prior to any implementation, to determine if the proposed changes, modifications or expansions meet the definitions of substantive change guidelines as established by SACSCOC. The liaison is responsible



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for ensuring that substantive changes are recognized and reported in a timely fashion, and will consult with the SACSCOC staff member assigned to the University as necessary.

The SACSCOC liaison will ensure that the University follows all SACSCOC substantive change procedures, and the President of the University will inform SACSCOC of substantive changes as specified in the procedures.

### **III. Responsibility for this Operating Policy**

#### **Policy Owner**

As part of the initial approval of this policy by the President and subsequent to the original dissemination of the policy, the President remains the policy owner for the ongoing evaluation, review, and approval of this policy. Subsequent reviews and revisions to this policy must be in accordance with approved operating policy procedures and processes.

This policy will be reviewed every two years or more frequently as needed by the Policy Owner. Revisions will be reviewed/affirmed by the Cabinet and approved by the University President. This policy will be updated/published in the University's Policy Library.

#### **Responsibility for Policy Implementation**

The President has assigned the responsibility of implementing this policy to the SACSCOC Liaison, under the direction of the President and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services.