

TSU Policy # 02.01 Name of Policy: Substantive Change

Source: Division of Academic Affairs

Statement of Policy

Tennessee State University (TSU) is accredited by the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges](#) (SACSCOC) to award associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees.

As part of SACSCOC policy, TSU must first notify or obtain approval from SACSCOC before it implements any substantive change in its academic programs. This is done after approval has been obtained at all of the appropriate levels including curricula committees, administrative approvals, and Board approval.

Definitions

As defined by SACSCOC, the definition of a substantive change is:

A significant modification or expansion in the nature and scope of an accredited institution.

Substantive Change Notification and Approval Requirements

TSU shall follow SACSCOC policy, including the SACSCOC document entitled, [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#), in identifying the types of substantive change subject to this policy and the procedures for complying with SACSCOC's notification and approval requirements.

TSU shall adhere to the following guidance to ensure compliance with the applicable SACSCOC Substantive Change requirements:

Distance Education – Institutional-level Approval

Distance education is a method of delivery in which the majority of instruction occurs when students and instructors are not in the same location. It includes synchronous (live or real-time) and asynchronous (not live or real-time) instruction.

An institution's *first* program in which 50% or more of the program may be earned by distance education requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. This approves both the program and approves the institution to offer distance education programs subject to additional approvals or notifications described below.

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 it is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs, —OR—
- new program notification if it is not a significant departure from the institution's existing programs, —OR—
- notification as an additional method of delivery for an existing program.

Method of Delivery – Approval OR Notification

Adding a method of instructional delivery to an existing program requires approval prior to implementation only for an institution on SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE RESTRICTION.

An institution not on SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE RESTRICTION is not required to seek approval to add a method of delivery to a program but is required to provide notification (prior to implementation).

The three methods of delivery are

- competency-based education,
- distance education, and
- face-to-face instruction.

New Program – Approval

A new program with 50-100% new content is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs and requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation.

- Content is new if it is not currently offered by the institution at the new program's instructional level (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, or doctoral).
- A determination of the percentage of new content is made by the institution, not SACSCOC.
- New program approval equally applies to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credential.
- If the institution is not currently approved to offer courses or programs at the new program's instructional level, a level change approval is required (e.g., the institution's first courses or programs at the baccalaureate degree level).
- Increasing the level of a program, i.e., offering a new program in a discipline at a higher instructional level than a currently offered program, is by definition a significant departure. For example, if an institution offers a baccalaureate degree program in a discipline and begins a new program in the same discipline at the master's degree level, then the new program is a significant departure and requires approval prior to implementation. This applies across all instructional levels.

New Program – Notification

A new program with 25-49% new content is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs and requires notification prior to implementation.

- Content is new if it is not currently offered by the institution at the new program's instructional level (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, or doctoral).
- A determination of the percentage of new content is made by the institution, not SACSCOC.
- New program notification equally applies to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credential.
- If the institution is not currently approved to offer courses or programs at the new program's instructional level, a level change approval is required (e.g., the institution's first courses or programs at the baccalaureate degree level).

Program Closure

Closing a program requires SACSCOC approval. Approval requires a teach-out plan.

Closure is defined as closed to admission or entry, not the cessation of instruction; i.e., closure date is when students can no longer start, not the date instruction ends. Closure approval ensures the institution has a plan and process to provide students reasonable completion options that minimize disruption and additional costs. Because closure approval is approval of the teach-out process, not the closure per se (i.e., not after the fact), a teach-out plan should be submitted as soon as possible after the decision is made to close.

Program closure includes ending a program at all locations or by all methods of delivery, but also includes ending a student's completion option at a specific location or by a specific method of delivery. Therefore, program closure approval is required if a program closes

- at a location (on-campus or off-campus instructional site) but continues to be offered at other locations, or
- by a method of delivery but continues to be offered by other methods of delivery.

Off-campus Instructional Site Notification

An off-campus instructional site at which 25-49% of a program's instruction is delivered requires notification prior to implementation.

Off-campus Instructional Site Approval (including branch campus)

An off-campus instructional site at which 50% or more of a program's instruction is delivered requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation.

An off-campus instructional site may qualify as a branch campus; refer to the federally defined branch campus criteria at the beginning of this section. Before submitting a prospectus for approval of branch campus, ensure – and demonstrate in the prospectus – *all* branch campus criteria are met. A site name may not include “branch” or “branch campus” unless approved as a branch campus as defined in policy.

There are two site approval pathways:

- approval by extensive review, AND
- approval by limited review.

Other Changes

Larger scale changes, such as institutional-level changes, program level changes, institutional contingency teach-out plan, governance change, or program length change require SACSCOC approval; while other changes such as cooperative academic arrangements or dual academic award, require SACSCOC notification.

In addition to obtaining appropriate administrative and TSU Board approvals (see [academic modification guidelines](#)), any academic program director, department chair, and/or dean must notify the Institutional Accreditation Liaison if there will be changes to the program as listed above and provide appropriate paperwork.

Updated December 2020