Policies and Procedures for Substantive Change

University of North Alabama

As a condition of membership, institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) have responsibility for compliance with the Commission's substantive change procedures and policy (Comprehensive Standard 3.12). The University of North Alabama is committed to ensuring that the institution meets that standard and all policies embedded therein. The following policies and procedures have been adopted by the institution to provide a framework for monitoring compliance.

Responsibility for Monitoring Substantive Change

The Council of Academic Deans (COAD), in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison, is charged with the responsibility of monitoring compliance with SACSCOC substantive change. As part of that responsibility the COAD has in place policies and procedures that monitor ongoing compliance with all substantive changes identified by SACSCOC and enumerated below. Any institutional change enacted, as outlined below, is submitted to the COAD for review and prior approval as required. Once approved, the UNA SACSCOC Liaison ensures the proper submission to SACSCOC.

There are three different types of review by SACSCOC depending on the nature of the proposed substantive change. Procedure One items require approval prior to implementation. Procedure Two items require notification prior to implementation. Procedure Three pertains to closing a program, instructional site, institution or branch campuses, teach-out plans, and teach-out agreements. These activities require prior approval.

Procedure One Substantive Change Guidelines

Initiating Coursework, Certificates, or Programs of Study at a Different Level than Those Previously Approved by SACSCOC

UNA is currently authorized by SACSCOC as a Level IV institution to offer degree programs at the baccalaureate, master's, and specialist levels. Should a unit of UNA seek to offer a program below the baccalaureate level or beyond the specialist, it would be required to obtain internal approvals, including initial review by the COAD as well as sanction and approval by the University. Once internal and trustee approvals have been granted, the institution would seek authorization from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE). Once those approvals are granted, an Application for Members Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level is completed under the supervision of the COAD. The university president submits the application to SACSCOC. Prior approval by SACSCOC is required before initiation of the program. In some cases, repackaging of an existing degree may require only advanced notification.

Initiating Certificate Programs for Workforce Development

Proposals to initiate certificate programs for workforce development are submitted by the UNA unit proposing the program to the COAD for monitoring and initial review. Proposals are required to obtain internal approvals and ACHE approval where required. The university president submits the request to SACSCOC. Prior approval is required, regardless of where the workforce training request originates and whether it is on campus or at a worksite.

Initiating Other Certificate Programs

Certificate programs offered at a new (unapproved) site or in a curricular area that is a significant departure from previously approved programs must be reviewed and approved in advance by SACSCOC. Offering previously approved certificate programs at an unapproved off-campus site requires SACSCOC approval of the site prior to implementation. Certificate programs that are an extension of existing academic programs already approved (drawn from the existing approved curriculum for a degree program) do not require SACSCOC approval. Proposals for new certificate programs at UNA are submitted for review and approval, the same as any other new academic initiative. The certificate program will be reviewed by the COAD, in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison, to determine if submission to SACSCOC is required per the substantive change policy. If so, the university president submits the proposal to SACSCOC.

Initiating an Off-Campus (additional) site (site-based classroom/group instruction) at Which Students Can Earn at least 50% of the Credits Toward an Educational Program

Should UNA seek to establish an off campus site whereby at least 50% of the credits are offered, the proposal must receive initial review through submission to the COAD. This includes initiating off-campus sites such as Early College and dual enrollment programs offered at a high school. (SACSCOC considers any location where students must be present on-site to receive instruction as an off-campus instructional site, even if the instruction is provided via distance delivery.) Assuming internal approvals are granted through the University and external approval is obtained from ACHE, the required prospectus will be prepared by the unit planning to offer programs at the site. It will reviewed by COAD in collaboration with the SACSCOC Liaison. The university president then submits the full prospectus to SACSCOC. Once UNA is approved to offer a program at three or more sites, a modified prospectus is allowed. Off-campus sites are reviewed by SACSCOC every five years, either in the context of the fifth-year or the decennial review.

Initiating Degree Completion Programs

Should UNA seek to establish a degree completion program, the request for the program must first be reviewed by the COAD and gain internal approval through the University and through external approval by ACHE. The unit seeking to offer the program would then be required to prepare a full prospectus. The prospectus would be reviewed by the COAD and by the UNA SACSCOC Liaison prior to submission to SACSCOC by the university president.

Initiating a Branch Campus

SACSCOC defines a branch campus as including four items: (1) permanent in nature, (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, (3) has its own faculty and administrative organization, and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority. Should UNA seek to create a campus that includes these criteria, the proposal would first be submitted to the COAD for monitoring and initial review. The new campus would then be subject to internal approval by the University, including the UNA Board of Trustees and also external approval by ACHE. A full prospectus would be developed under the auspices of the COAD and in collaboration with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison. The university president would then submit the prospectus to SACSCOC.

Initiating Distance Learning or Correspondence Courses and Programs by Which Students Can Earn at Least 50% of a Program's Credits through Delivery in a Format Other than Face to Face

UNA already offers multiple DL programs with SACSCOC approval so this requirement related to initiation of DL programs is not applicable except in cases where the academic program is a significant departure from current approved offerings. In such a case the program would need the same internal and external approvals required for face-to-face courses and the submission of a prospectus for SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. The COAD is responsible for monitoring DL instruction for all programs to ensure quality and to ensure SACSCOC compliance.

The University must demonstrate that a student who registers for a distance learning course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. Means of verification could include a secure login and pass code, proctored examinations, or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification. Processes used to verify student identity must also protect student privacy.

Expanding at the Institution's Current Degree Level

Should UNA decide to pursue academic programs that are a significant departure from currently approved offerings such action is considered a substantive change by SACSCOC requiring advance approval. An example provided by SACSCOC is the creation of a master's degree in nursing when current offerings include only degree programs in education. As new program proposals are created and submitted, they will receive initial review from the COAD for monitoring purposes. If such proposals gain internal approvals and external approval through ACHE and are considered by the COAD (in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison) to be a significant departure, a proposal will be developed requesting approval. The university president would then submit the proposal to SACSCOC.

Initiating a Significant Change in the Established Mission of the Institution

Any change in mission that leads to a fundamental shift in the nature of the institution must be approved by SACSCOC. Proposals for such receive initial review for monitoring purposes by the COAD. The change in mission must be approved by the University and by the UNA Board of Trustees. Following university approval, the university president submits a request to SACSCOC for approval of the mission

change. Editorial changes to the University's mission statement are not considered to be a substantive change and need not be submitted to SACSCOC.

Changing from Clock Hours to Credit Hours

Such actions are considered a substantive change by SACSCOC and must receive prior approval. UNA currently uses credit hours so this policy is not applicable.

Changing Significantly the Length of a Program, Substantially Increasing or Decreasing the Number of Clock or Credit Hours Awarded for Successful Completion of a Program

Proposals to increase or decrease the number of credit hours required for a program receive initial review by the COAD and then go forward for university approval. In such cases the COAD will determine, in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison, if the increase constitutes a substantive change as defined in SACSCOC guidelines. If so, the university president submits a request to SACSCOC for approval of the change.

Initiating a Direct Assessment Competency-Based Program

If a unit of UNA seeks to initiate a direct assessment competency-based program or a hybrid direct assessment competency-based program it would be required to obtain internal approvals, including initial review by the COAD as well as sanction and approval by the University. Once internal have been granted, the institution would seek approval from ACHE. Such proposals would be governed by the SACSCOC policy "Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs." The COAD would monitor the development of such programs. The university president must provide notification to SACSCOC when the institution begins to offer a direct assessment program in which a student can earn 25 percent of an educational credential (e.g., certificate or degree) based on measured achievement of competencies rather than credit or clock hours. If UNA seeks to offer an entire program that is direct assessment or a program in which at least 50 percent of the competency-based program is direct assessment the university must seek approval from SACSCOC at least six months in advance of the initiation of 50 percent of the educational credential based solely on measured achievement of competencies. The proposing academic unit would first complete the required screening form, which is submitted to SACSCOC by the university president. If a prospectus is required the proposing unit would compile the prospectus in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison and the COAD. The document would then be submitted by the university president in accordance with the required timetable: by April 8 or by September 15 for review at the subsequent SACSCOC Board of Trustees meeting.

Relocating a Main or Branch Campus

Should UNA seek to relocate a campus, internal approvals would be required as well as approval by the UNA Board of Trustees. External approval from ACHE would also be required. Once those approvals are gained, the university president submits a prospectus to SACSCOC.

Initiating a Collaborative Academic Program with Another Institution Not Accredited by SACSCOC

Should UNA wish to enter into such agreements, they would first be reviewed by the COAD for monitoring and compliance purposes. The agreements would also require internal approvals through the University and by ACHE. Once approved, a prospectus demonstrating compliance with the SACSCOC policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards" would be prepared by the unit seeking to create the collaborative program. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Entering Into a Contract with an Entity Not Certified to Participate in USDOE Title IV Programs

If a partnership with such an entity includes the award of 25% or more of the program, it must receive internal review through both the COAD and the University. Once approved, a prospectus is created by the unit working with the entity. The prospectus, including a copy of the signed agreement, would then be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Procedure Two Substantive Change Guidelines
(Requiring Notification, Not Approval)

Initiating an Off-Campus Site (sited-based/classroom group instruction where the instructor is present) at Which a Student May Earn at Least 25% but Less Than 50% of Credits toward a Program

UNA action creating an off-campus site that meets these criteria requires a letter of notification to SACSCOC prior to implementation. The notification letter must include the starting date and physical address of the site. The COAD maintains responsibility for monitoring compliance with this requirement. When such occurs, the university president transmits a notification letter to SACSCOC. (Note: If only 24% or less of the credits needed for a program can be earned at the site no notification is needed.)

Moving an Approved Off-Campus Instructional Site within the Same Geographic Area to Serve Essentially the Same Pool of Students

UNA action consistent with this requirement requires a letter of notification to SACSCOC prior to implementation. The notification letter must designate the new address and old address and the starting date. The COAD maintains responsibility for monitoring compliance with this requirement. When such occurs, the university president transmits a notification letter to SACSCOC.

For Distance Learning/Technology-based Group or Individual Instruction (instructor and students are in separate locations) Offering for the First Time Credit Courses Via Distance Learning/Technology-based Instruction by Which Students Can Obtain at least 25% but Less than 50% of their Credits Toward an Educational Program

UNA already offers multiple DL programs so this requirement for first time offerings is not applicable. However, the COAD is responsible for monitoring DL instruction for all programs to ensure quality and to ensure SACSCOC compliance.

Adding Programs (Approved for the Institution) that are Significantly Different from Previously Reported Programs Offered through Distance Learning.

Because UNA is already approved to offer more than 50 percent of multiple programs via Distance Learning it need only notify SACSCOC when approved programs that are significantly different from its current distance learning offerings are added to the array of distance learning programs. This notification is required only if 50 percent or more of the credits for the added program is offered via distance delivery. The COAD is responsible for monitoring UNA's distance learning to identify the development of programs significantly different from previous DL offerings.

Initiating Program/Courses Delivered through Contractual Agreement or a Consortium

The COAD is responsible for monitoring partnerships, agreements, and consortia participation to ensure compliance. Any new initiatives will be reviewed for compliance and notification. This provision does NOT apply to articulation agreements, clinical agreements, or internship agreements. Should SACSCOC need to be notified, the university president will transmit a copy of the signed agreement including the names of all institutions involved, and the starting date of the agreement.

Initiating Joint or Dual Degree Programs with Another SACSCOC-Accredited Institution

Should UNA wish to develop a joint or dual degree program with another SACSCOC-accredited institution the program proposal would first be reviewed by the COAD for monitoring and compliance purposes. The program would be developed in accordance with the SACSCOC policy, "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards." The agreement would require internal university approvals and external approval by ACHE. Once approved, the university president will transmit to SACSCOC a copy of the signed agreement (prior to implementation) and contact information for each institution.

Repackaging of an Existing Approved Curriculum to Create a New Degree Level

Should UNA decide to create an academic program from within existing course offerings that leads to a different degree level not higher than any currently approved, the request would be reviewed and monitored by the COAD and require internal university approvals and external approval through ACHE. The university president would then transmit a notification letter to SACSCOC.

Entering Into a Contract with an Entity Not Certified to Participate in USDOE Title IV if the Entity Provides less Than 25% of an Educational Program Offered by the Accredited Institution

UNA must provide SACSCOC a copy of any such agreements. The university president will provide notification and transmit a signed copy of the agreement.

<div align="center">**Procedure Three Substantive Change Guidelines**</div>

Closing a Program, Instructional Site, Branch Campus or an Institution: Teach-Out Plans and Teach Out Agreements

If UNA decides to close a program or eliminate an instructional site and/or campus the students must have a reasonable opportunity to complete their program of study, either at UNA or at a designated institution specified within a teach-out agreement. In such cases, a written teach-out plan and/or a teach-out agreement is developed. The plan and/or agreement must be approved by SACSCOC prior to implementation. The required elements of the plan and/or agreement are outlined under substantive change guidelines on the SACSCOC web site. In such cases, the plan and/or agreement will be developed by the COAD in consultation with the president and with the senior leadership of the teach-out agreement institution where applicable. The plan will be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

<div align="center">**Other Types of Substantive Changes**</div>

Initiating a Merger/Consolidation with Another Institution

If UNA seeks to initiate a merger or consolidation with another institution it would require internal approval through the University and the University's Board of Trustees, as well as external approval by ACHE. In such cases, the merger or consolidation plan and/or agreement would be developed by the president and the senior leadership in cooperation with the UNA Board of Trustees. Once the approvals were obtained the change would be governed by the SACSCOC Policy "Mergers, Consolidations, and Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" and would require SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. Submission dates for this type of Substantive Change Prospectus are April 8 or September 15. The prospectus would then be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Changing Governance, Ownership, Control, Form, or Legal Status

If UNA seeks to change governance, ownership, control, form, or legal status it would require internal approval through the University and the University's Board of Trustees, as well as external approval by ACHE, and the State of Alabama Legislature. In such cases, the proposal for change would be developed by the president and the senior leadership in cooperation with the UNA Board of Trustees. Once the approvals were obtained the change would be governed by the SACSCOC Policy "Mergers, Consolidations, and Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" and would require SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. Submission dates for this type of Substantive Change Prospectus are April 8 or September 15. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Acquiring of an Institution or Site

If UNA seeks to acquire another institution or an additional site it would require internal approval through the University and the University's Board of Trustees, as well as external approval by ACHE, and

the State of Alabama Legislature. In such cases, the proposal for change would be developed by the president and the senior leadership in cooperation with the UNA Board of Trustees. Once the approvals were obtained the change would be governed by the SACSCOC Policy "Mergers, Consolidations, and Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" and would require SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. Submission dates for this type of Substantive Change Prospectus are April 8 or September 15. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Acquiring a Program from Another Institution

If UNA seeks to acquire a program from another institution it would require internal approval through the University and the University's Board of Trustees, as well as external approval by ACHE. In such cases, the proposal for change would be developed by the president and the senior leadership in cooperation with the UNA Board of Trustees. Once the approvals were obtained the change would be governed by the SACSCOC Policy "Mergers, Consolidations, and Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" and would require SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Adding a Permanent Location at a Site Where the Institution is Conducting a Teach-Out for an Institution that is Closing

If UNA seeks to add a permanent location at a site in order to conduct a teach-out program for an institution that is closing it would require internal approval through the University and the University's Board of Trustees, as well as external approval by ACHE, and perhaps the State of Alabama Legislature. In such cases, the proposal for change would be developed by the president and the senior leadership of UNA in cooperation with the UNA Board of Trustees and the senior leadership from the institution that is closing. Once the approvals were obtained the change would be governed by the SACSCOC Policy "Mergers, Consolidations, and Change of Ownership, Acquisitions, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status" and would require SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

Summary

In summary, the Council of Academic Deans, in consultation with the UNA SACSCOC Liaison, assumes primary responsibility for remaining abreast of substantive change policies and ensuring that the University of North Alabama is fully compliant with those policies. To assist in compliance, the COAD will hold a workshop each spring semester to review the most recent SACSCOC substantive change policies. The Policies and Procedures for Substantive Change will be revised as required to meet changing SACSCOC guidelines. Official minutes of COAD meetings will be used to document compliance with the policies and procedures outlined herein.

Approved by
SACSCOC Leadership Team, February 8, 2012
Council of Academic Deans, February 13, 2012
Campus Notification of Policy, February 20, 2012
Amended by Council of Academic Deans, August 22, 2012
SACSCOC Liaison, August 28, 2012
President of the University, August 30, 2012
Council of Academic Deans on October 14, 2013
SACSCOC Liaison, November 6, 2013
President of the University, November 4, 2013
Amended by Council of Academic Deans, April 6, 2015
Executive Council, April 13, 2015
Amended by Council of Academic Deans, March 8, 2016
Affirmed by Executive Council, March 14, 2016