

## **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, 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 and the UNA Board of Trustees as needed. 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 site or in a curricular area that is a significant departure from previously approved programs must be reviewed and approved in advance by SACSCOC. Certificate programs that are an extension of existing academic programs already approved 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 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 through external approval by 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. However, the COAD is responsible for monitoring DL instruction for all programs to ensure quality and to ensure SACSCOC compliance.

#### 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. The example provided by SACSCOC is the creation of a master's degree in nursing when current offerings include only 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 the Number of Clock or Credit Hours Awarded for Successful Completion of a Program

Proposals to increase 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.

#### 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, the UNA Board of Trustees (where applicable) and by ACHE. Once approved, a prospectus 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 would then be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

### **Procedure Two Substantive Change Guidelines**

#### Initiating an Off-Campus Site 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.

#### 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 Instruction (instructor and students are in separate locations) Offering for the First Time Credit Courses Via Distance Learning 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.

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 copy of the agreement.

**Procedure Three Substantive Change Guidelines**

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

If UNA decides to close a program, 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.

### **Other Types of Substantive Changes**

#### 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 15 or October 1. 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 15 or October 1. The prospectus would be transmitted to SACSCOC by the university president.

#### Acquiring of an Institution or a 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 15 or October 1. 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 February 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