

Responsibilities and Procedures for Obtaining Approval of Potential Substantive Changes at George Mason University

George Mason University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). As part of that accreditation, Mason must report all substantive changes to the Commission. Depending on the specific substantive change, Mason must take action in notifying and providing documentation to SACSCOC anywhere from 3 to 9 months before a substantive change is implemented. Many substantive changes require documentation in the form of a comprehensive prospectus, while others may require prior approval from SACSCOC before implementation of the change may occur. In particular, college-level units must plan ahead to provide sufficient time in advance of any desired implementation dates for substantive changes, taking note of required SACSCOC submission dates and adhering to submission timelines provided by the Office of the Provost. This requires considerable planning on the part of the college/school/local academic unit.

I. Types of Substantive Changes

Institutional Substantive Changes	Program Substantive Changes	Off-Campus Instructional Site Substantive Changes
Change in Measure of Student Progress to Completion	Clock-Credit Hour Conversion	Off-campus Instructional Site Notification 25%-49%
Competency-based Education by Course/Credit-based Approach – Institutional-level Approval	Competency-based Education by Direct Assessment – Approval	Off-campus Instructional Site Extensive Review Approval (including branch campus)
Distance Education – Institutional-level Approval	Competency-based Education by Direct Assessment – Notification	Off-campus Instructional Site Limited Review Approval (including branch campus) 50% or more
Correspondence Education – Institutional-level Approval	Cooperative Academic Arrangement	Off-campus Instructional Site Relocation Non-Branch Campus
Governance Change	Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Non-Title IV Entities – Approval	Off-campus Instructional Site Relocation Branch Campus
Institution Closure	Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Non-Title IV Entities – Notification	Off-campus Instructional Site Name or Address Change
Institution Relocation	Correspondence Education - Approval *Approval only required if on restriction	Off-campus Instructional Site Closure
Institution, Program, or Location Acquisition	Correspondence Education- Notification	Off-campus Instructional Site Re-open
Institutional Contingency Teach-out Plan	Dual Academic Award	
Level Change *Additional Requirements and deadlines	Joint Academic Award with non-SACSCOC Institution(s) or Entity(ies)	
Merger / Consolidation	Joint Academic Award with SACSCOC Institution(s)	
Mission Change	Method of Delivery – Approval *Approval only required if on restriction	
Ownership, Means of Control, or Legal Status Change	Method of Delivery – Notification	
	New Program – Approval	
	New Program – Notification	
	Program Closure	
	Program Designed for Prior Learning – Approval	
	Program Designed for Prior Learning – Notification	
	Program Length Change	
	Program Re-open	

II. Responsibilities

An academic department or unit that is considering what may possibly be defined by SACSCOC to be a substantive change or program modification must discuss the potential changes with Mason's Director of Accreditation (see contact information at the end of this document) as soon as possible when the potential changes are being contemplated, as many changes cannot be implemented prior to SACSCOC approval.

When adding one or more courses to the offerings at an existing or new off-site location, special attention must be paid in order to maintain compliance with the accreditation standards. Departments and units considering this type of change must follow the procedure as outlined in below.

The Director of Accreditation at George Mason University is responsible for

- providing guidance to Mason's colleges, schools, and other units in determining whether a potential change meet the thresholds identified by SACSCOC policy to be considered "substantive;"
- providing guidance to Mason's colleges, schools, and other units in developing prospectuses and teach-out plans for submission to SACSCOC;
- ensuring that the University's academic leaders and senior administrators meet their responsibilities with regard to substantive change;
- obtaining final signatures on submissions to SACSCOC and ensuring their timely submission;
- maintaining a comprehensive log of all substantive changes submitted by Mason to SACSCOC; and
- notifying appropriate members of the university community regarding changes to the SACSCOC policy on substantive change

In turn, the College's administrators and the leaders of the academic departments/local academic units (LAUs) should:

- be familiar with the basic tenets of substantive change;
- understand how their areas and decisions might impact accreditation;
- monitor all program and course offerings provided at off-campus locations so that, when offerings reach 25% or are nearing 50% of credits towards a degree or credential, the department/LAU leadership notifies the Director of Accreditation;
- keep the Director of Accreditation informed of any potential substantive changes that are being considered, in order to ensure that Mason remains in compliance with the Commission's Principles of Accreditation;
- ensure timely submission of prospectus/teach-out materials (when required) to the Director of Accreditation by appropriate individuals within their units;
- ensure that **no substantive change is implemented** prior to approval by SACSCOC or the Office of the Provost; and
- reach out to the Director of Accreditation with any questions

III. Procedures

1. Leaders of departments/LAUs and other units within the University shall notify the Director of Accreditation of potential substantive changes that are under consideration within the college/school/department/LAU/unit. Such notification shall occur well in advance of when the changes shall need to be implemented, in accordance with timelines established by the Office of the Provost. The Director of Accreditation will provide advice and guidance as to whether or not the proposed change is one that falls under SACSCOC's substantive change reporting requirements.
2. If the proposed change meets the definition of a reportable substantive change according to SACSCOC policy, the Director of Accreditation will advise the academic unit leaders as to what type of submission is required to SACSCOC. This information can also be found in the "SubChange Actions and Information" spreadsheet.

The "SubChange Actions and Information" spreadsheet provides college-level units with important information, including:

- Whether prior approval by SACSCOC is required
- Whether an on-site visit is required

- Whether a fee is associated with the change
- Submission dates relative to desired implementation
- Whether submission of a prospectus and/or teach-out plan is required, along with information to include in such submissions

The “SubChange Actions and Information” spreadsheet is not a substitute for contacting the Office of the Provost for guidance regarding substantive change. Colleges/schools/local academic units should still contact the Director of Accreditation for advice regarding potential substantive changes.

- For submissions requiring a prospectus and/or teach-out plan
 - The Director of Accreditation will provide guidelines as to the format and required content of the prospectus.
 - The department or local academic unit (LAU) requesting the change will complete the primary work in preparing the prospectus. The Director of Accreditation is available to consult during this process.
 - The department/LAU submits the prospectus to the appropriate dean (or designee), who will review the prospectus. When the academic leaders of the college/school approve of the prospectus and its content, they shall submit it electronically by email to the Director of Accreditation. See contact information at the end of this document.
 - The prospectus must be received by the Director of Accreditation at least three weeks prior to the desired date of submission of the prospectus. This allows time for review of the prospectus, revision if needed based upon review within the Office of the Provost, and obtaining necessary signatures.
 - The Director of Accreditation will prepare the cover letter and SACSCOC Cover Sheet for Submission of Substantive Changes and will obtain the necessary signatures.
 - The Director of Accreditation will notify the College/School/LAU of approval by SACSCOC or of any requests for additional information by the Commission. All requests for additional information should be acted upon swiftly by the College/School/LAU, as delays in submission of a response may result in delays in the desired implementation timeline. Substantive changes requiring SACSCOC approval cannot be implemented prior to conferral of that approval.
 - For substantive changes requiring simple notification to SACSCOC
 - Upon notification by the college/school/LAU, the Director of Accreditation will obtain any necessary information and prepare a letter of notification for submission to SACSCOC.
 - The Director of Accreditation will notify the College/School/LAU of approval by SACSCOC or of any requests for additional information by the Commission.
3. For all proposed changes related to course and/or program offerings at off-site locations, the Director of Accreditation must be consulted as soon as a change is being considered. This is particularly important due to the University's requirements under SACSCOC policy for off-site locations.

Specifically, the University is required to:

- notify SACSCOC if 25% or more of any degree or credential can be earned at an off-campus instructional site (OCIS).
- obtain prior approval in order to offer 50% or more of any degree or credential at an OCIS. This type of change will require a prospectus.

IV. Contact Information

Susan B. Woodruff
Interim Director, Accreditation & State Authorization
SCHEV Liaison
Office of the Provost
Swoodru3@gmu.edu
703-993-8825