

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

I. Responsibilities

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, should an implementation be desired for the beginning of a fall semester, it should be expected that the substantive change prospectus is submitted to SACSCOC prior to January 1 prior to the fall of the desired implementation. This requires considerable planning on the part of the institution and the college/school/local academic unit.

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 changes typically 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 submissions 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 can notify 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;
- reach out to the Director of Accreditation with any questions; and

- ensure timely preparation (by appropriate individuals within their units) of prospectus materials (when required by SACSCOC policy) and submission of those materials to the Director of Accreditation

II. Procedures:

1. The Director of Accreditation will be notified by leaders of departments/LAUs and other units within the University 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. The Director of Accreditation will provide advice and guidance as to whether or not the proposed change is one that falls under the definition of Substantive Change.
2. If the proposed change meets the definition of a substantive change according to SACSCOC policy, the Director of Accreditation will advise the academic unit leaders as to whether the substantive change requires submission of a full prospectus, a modified prospectus, or a simple notification.
 - For submissions requiring a full or modified prospectus
 - 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 provide an electronic copy of the submission to the College/School/LAU.
 - The Director of Accreditation will notify the College/School/LAU of approval by SACSCOC or of any requests for additional information by the Commission.
 - For substantive changes not requiring a prospectus
 - The Director of Accreditation will notify the department or unit proposing the change, prepare a letter of notification for submission to SACSCOC, and obtain the necessary signatures.
 - The Director of Accreditation will provide an electronic copy of the submission to the College/School/LAU.
 - 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.

III. Contact Information

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