



## SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

### I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy sets forth the steps and requirements for faculty, administrators, and staff to monitor substantive changes occurring within academic programs at Mercer University and for the University to report such changes to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

#### Definition of Substantive Change

As noted in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, a substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes, and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs and services.

### II. POLICY

Mercer University is responsible for notifying SACSCOC of substantive changes in a timely manner, and, when required, seeking SACSCOC approval up to twelve months before implementing the change.

### III. PROCEDURES

#### A. Reporting

Mercer University will notify the SACSCOC of substantive changes in accordance with the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of such changes. Substantive changes can require notification, approval, or notification and approval. Only the President of Mercer University or the Institutional Accreditation Liaison may submit substantive changes to SACSCOC. Depending upon the substantive change, as directed in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, communications with SACSCOC will include the following:

1. For notification:
  - a. A completed SACSCOC Substantive Change Coversheet and a letter describing the substantive change
2. For approval:
  - a. A completed SACSCOC Substantive Change Coversheet, a letter describing the substantive change, and the documentation required by SACSCOC (usually, a prospectus or a teach-out plan)
3. In the event that a substantive change has been implemented without notification of and/or approval from SACSCOC, Mercer will formally notify the SACSCOC President upon discovery of the unreported substantive change.

## **B. Assigned Responsibility**

### **1. The President**

The President shall submit all substantive change correspondence from the University to the President of SACSCOC or shall designate that responsibility to the Institutional Accreditation Liaison.

### **2. The Institutional Accreditation Liaison**

Overall responsibility for ensuring the University's compliance with the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* is assigned to the Institutional Accreditation Liaison. The Liaison is responsible for monitoring campus substantive changes and initiating reporting of substantive changes. This includes working with the Graduate Council and the Undergraduate Council, the Deans Council, the President's Cabinet, and other University bodies as appropriate to ensure that the University follows the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. The Liaison shall annually inform campus agencies of the substantive change policy and request instances of substantive changes anticipated or planned for the upcoming 12-month period. The Liaison shall prepare appropriate letters of correspondence to the President of SACSCOC for execution by the President of Mercer University. If a prospectus is required by SACSCOC, the Liaison will coordinate with the deans and other senior administrators to prepare the prospectus for the President to submit to the President of SACSCOC.

### **3. Program Officers (associate deans, chairs, program directors, etc.)**

Administrators with responsibility for programs are responsible for understanding the substantive change policy for the purpose of identifying substantive changes and reporting them appropriately to the Accreditation Liaison.

### **4. Deans and Vice Presidents**

Deans and Vice Presidents are responsible for enforcing this policy within their respective schools/colleges and divisions.

### **5. Provost**

The Provost is responsible for enforcing all policies pertaining to the areas of academic affairs, including the substantive change policy.

## **IV. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES THAT APPLY TO MERCER UNIVERSITY**

As noted in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, substantive changes include, but are not limited to:

1. Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.
2. Changing the legal status, form of control, or ownership of an institution.
3. Changing the governance of an institution.
4. Merging/consolidating two or more institutions or entities.
5. Acquiring another institution or any program or location of another institution.
6. Relocating an institution or an off-campus instruction site of an institution.

7. Offering courses or programs at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.
8. Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non-time-based methods or measures.
9. Adding a program that is a significant departure from the existing programs or method of delivery from those offered when the institution was last evaluated.
10. Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.
11. Adding an additional method of delivery to a currently offered program.
12. Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement.
13. Entering into a written arrangement under 34 C.F.R. § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs. An agreement offering more than 50% of one or more of an institution's programs is prohibited by federal regulation.
14. Substantially increasing or decreasing the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated or an increase in the level of the credential awarded for successful completion of one or more programs.
15. Adding competency-based education programs.
16. Adding each competency-based education program by direct assessment.
17. Adding programs with completion pathways that recognize and accommodate a student's prior or existing knowledge or competency.
18. Awarding dual or joint academic awards.
19. Re-opening a previously closed program or off-campus instructional site.
20. Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.
21. Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.
22. Closing an institution, a program, a method of delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.

The following list includes frequently enacted examples at Mercer University:

1. Written request, SACSCOC approval of a full prospectus, and prior approval:
  - a. Offering a 50% or more of the credit hours needed to complete a degree at a new off-campus instructional site

2. Written request and SACSCOC prior approval:
  - a. Closing a degree program through a teach-out plan when the program stops admitting students
3. Written notification prior to implementation of substantive change:
  - a. Initiating an off-campus instructional site where students can obtain 25-49% of credit hours of a degree program
4. No SACSCOC Notification Necessary
  - a. Initiating a certificate or a degree program using existing approved courses

Amended: January 23, 2023  
Provost D. Scott Davis

Approved: April 9, 2013  
President William D. Underwood