

University of St. Thomas Policies

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

Policy Number: A.06.01

SCOPE

This policy applies to all University officers who can initiate, review, approve, and allocate resources to any changes, including those to academic and non-academic programs and activities, which may be considered a substantive change according to the policies of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (COC-SACS).

PURPOSE

This policy outlines the requirements, procedures, and processes for coordinating timely and complete notification of substantive change to our regional accrediting body, COC-SACS. The University is committed to full compliance with all standards, requirements, policies, and procedures associated with the definition and scope of a substantive change.

DEFINITIONS (Source: COC-SACS)

A. Substantive Change

Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Under federal regulations, substantive change includes:

- Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution.
- Any change in legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution.
- The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, either in content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated.
- The addition of courses or programs at a degree or credential level above that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or reaffirmation.
- A change from clock hours to credit hours.
- A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program.
- The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.
- The establishment of a branch campus.

B. Notification

A letter from the institution's chief executive officer to the president of COC-SACS summarizing the proposed change, providing the intended implementation date, and listing the complete physical address if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site or branch campus.

C. Branch Campus

A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature; (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

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D. Distance Learning

A formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

E. Mergers and Consolidations

A consolidation is the combination or transfer of the assets of at least two distinct institutions (corporations) to that of a newly-formed institution (corporation). A merger is the acquisition by one institution of another institution's assets. Consolidations and mergers are considered substantive changes requiring review by COC-SACS.

F. Off-Campus Site

A campus location providing educational course and/or program offerings that is at a different address than the main campus location.

G. Accreditation Liaison

The person responsible for ensuring the timely submission of annual institutional profiles and other reports as requested by COC-SACS. With the chief executive officer, the accreditation liaison is responsible for the accuracy of all information submitted to COC-SACS and for ensuring ongoing compliance with COC-SACS standards, policies, and procedures beyond reaffirmation. The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) is the COC-SACS accreditation liaison for the University of St. Thomas.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

01. Curriculum Changes

Any potential curriculum change that could be deemed substantive (as defined herein) must be submitted in writing by the applicable Dean to the VPAA. If the change is substantive, the VPAA will notify the Dean and outline the approval process specific to the substantive change. The Dean in coordination with the Department Chair/Program Director prepares the necessary documentation and forwards it to the VPAA. The VPAA reviews the documentation and prepares the President's cover letter and package to be sent to COC-SACS. With the approval of the President, the final package consisting of the President's cover letter and all required documentation is submitted to COC-SACS. A copy will be kept on file in the Office of Academic Affairs.

Once approval is received from COC-SACS, the program change is implemented. At this time, classes can be scheduled accordingly and marketing activities can begin.

02. New Facilities or Instructional Sites

Consistent with COC-SACS substantive change policy, the University of St. Thomas must ensure that the name and address of every instructional site at which it offers class credit is reported to COC-SACS. When a new facility or instructional site is approved by the University, further action depends on the percentage of credits toward the program that a student may earn at the new facility or instructional site as follows: (1) 25-49% – the President will notify COC-SACS at least 6 months prior to implementation;

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(2) 50% or more – a substantive change prospectus will be submitted and implementation will be initiated following COC-SACS approval.

The VPAA prepares the President's cover letter and appropriate documentation to be sent to COC-SACS. With the approval of the President, the final package consisting of the President's cover letter and all required documentation is submitted to COC-SACS. A copy will be kept on file in the Office of Academic Affairs.

Once approval is received from COC-SACS, the program change is implemented. At this time, classes can be scheduled accordingly and marketing activities related to this new site or facility can begin.

03. Changes in Instructional Delivery Method

New methods of instructional delivery involve significant departure from those assessed when the institution was most recently accredited. Processes for filing a substantive change request for deviations in instructional delivery are the same as those used for new programs or new facilities and instructional sites. Further actions are dependent on the percentage of credits toward the program that a student may earn as follows: (1) 25-49% – the President will notify COC-SACS at least 6 months prior to implementation; (2) 50% or more – a substantive change prospectus will be submitted and implementation will be initiated following COC-SACS approval.

The VPAA prepares the President's cover letter and appropriate documentation to be sent to COC-SACS. With the approval of the President, the final package consisting of the President's cover letter and all required documentation is submitted to COC-SACS. A copy will be kept on file in the Office of Academic Affairs.

Implementation of new delivery methods is dependent on COC-SACS prior approval.

04. Other Types of Substantive Change

COC-SACS considers other institutional actions as substantial deviation from those assessed when the institution was most recently accredited. These include: (1) initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level; (2) contractual agreements; (3) non-credit offerings that affect the institutional mission; and (4) changes in the established mission or objectives of the institution, legal status, form of control, or ownership.

All external approvals from the appropriate entities must be obtained previous to the initiation of the substantive change request process. Documentation of these approvals must be included in the substantive change package sent to COC-SACS.

Processes for filing a substantive change request for these actions are the same as stated throughout this document. Implementation of these changes is dependent on COC-SACS prior approval.

APPROVED: Dr. Robert Ivany

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