



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **AGREEMENTS INVOLVING JOINT AND DUAL ACADEMIC AWARDS: POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **Policy Statement**

This policy pertains to agreements between institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and accredited or non-accredited degree-granting institutions of higher education throughout the world for purposes of awarding academic completion awards, e.g., certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

For the purposes of review by SACSCOC, the following definitions apply:

- An agreement by two or more institutions to grant dual academic awards is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature.
- An agreement by two or more institutions to grant a joint academic award is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and the institutions grant a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

While SACSCOC member institutions may use alternative terms for agreements involving dual or joint academic awards (for example, “affiliations” or “partnerships” or “collaborations”) for purposes of reporting agreements involving dual or joint academic awards, they are responsible for using the above definitions and for following the appropriate procedures described below.

For the reporting of other arrangements or agreements not involving dual or joint academic awards, member institutions should consult the Substantive Change Policy and reporting requirements for other reviews by SACSCOC.

### **Responsibilities of SACSCOC Member Institutions**

**Provide Appropriate Information to SACSCOC:** Member institutions are responsible for providing notification to SACSCOC of agreements involving dual or joint academic awards, providing signed copies of the agreements, and providing any other documentation or information required by SACSCOC policies and procedures for review. Specific required documentation is listed below.

**Ensure Access to Partner Institutions’ Information:** The member institution is responsible for ensuring that SACSCOC has timely access to the partner institutions’ materials, physical site(s) and personnel in conjunction with accreditation activities.

**Ensure the Integrity of their Accreditation and their Awards:** Because the SACSCOC accreditation that has been awarded to a member institution is not transferable to a partner institution—either in actuality or appearance—SACSCOC prohibits the use of its accreditation to authenticate courses, programs, or awards offered by organizations not so accredited with which it has formed partnerships. Likewise, member institutions

are responsible for ensuring the quality of courses, programs, or awards offered through relationships with other institutions, particularly those resulting in dual or joint academic awards.

**Provide a Disclaimer Statement:** Member institutions entering into agreements with institutions not accredited by SACSCOC for the awarding of either dual or joint academic awards and their non-SACSCOC partner institutions must use the following disclaimer statement in any materials describing the relationship. The member institution is responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring the non-SACSCOC partner institutions' statements of relationship to ensure conformity with the disclaimer:

[Name of SACSCOC member institution] is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award [state degree levels]. [Name of partner institution] is not accredited by SACS Commission on Colleges and the accreditation of [name of member institution] does not extend to or include [name of partner institution] or its students. Further, although [name of member institution] agrees to accept certain course work from [name of partner institution] to be applied toward an award from [name of member institution], that course work may not be accepted by other colleges or universities in transfer, even if it appears on a transcript from [name of member institution]. The decision to accept course work in transfer from any institution is made by the institution considering the acceptance of credits or course work.

**Ensure Appropriate Percentages of Work Offered by the Member Institution:** To receive an undergraduate academic award, students must earn 25 percent or more of the credits required for the award through the SACSCOC member institution's own direct instruction. To receive a graduate academic award, students must earn one-third or more of the credits through the SACSCOC member institution's own direct instruction.

**Avoid Use of the SACSCOC Logo:** Neither member nor partner institutions may use the SACSCOC logo in any of their materials or on websites. Use of the logo is reserved exclusively for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

**Ensure the Quality of Credits Recorded on Transcripts:** When evaluating, accepting, and transcribing credits awarded through an agreement involving dual or joint academic awards, the member institution must ensure the following:

- Examine courses transferred in and transcribed from partner institutions to ensure that they meet the requirements of the member institution and the requirements of *The Principles of Accreditation*. (See a list of applicable requirements below.)
- Assess and monitor effectively courses and components completed through instruction by partner institutions. The assessment and monitoring should be accomplished by academically-qualified persons.
- Record on the academic transcript the name of the institution from which a course is taken. If a member institution desires to transcript as its own a course taken through an agreement with a partner institution, it must be able to demonstrate that the instruction was provided under the member's supervision and included approval of the academic qualifications of each instructor in advance and that regular evaluation of the effectiveness of each instructor occurs.
- Disclose fully the nature of the agreement on the transcript of the institutions awarding the degree.
- Reflect accurately in its catalog the courses being offered through the agreement if they are available to its own students as part of an educational program.
- Ensure that qualified and competent faculty members at each participating institution agree on the content and teaching methodologies of courses and education programs and on the qualifications of the faculty members who teach in the programs. Qualifications of teaching faculty must comply with the faculty competence requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*.
- Ensure that the educational outcomes of a major or concentration offered as part of dual or joint award agreements are (1) comparable to the outcomes of the same major or concentration offered by the institutions or, if not offered by any of the participating institutions, (2) comparable to the outcomes of a peer institution external to the agreement that offers the same educational program's major or concentration.

- Ensure that, within the agreement, there is appropriate faculty accountability to the institutions accepting the credit, perhaps through dual faculty appointments or other approaches that include evaluation by the accepting institution.

**Ensure Compliance with Appropriate SACSCOC Requirements:** Requirements and standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* which affect the implementation of agreements involving dual and joint academic awards are listed below. They should be considered when developing the agreement, documentation of compliance, and, if relevant, a substantive change prospectus:

- Integrity (Section 1)
- Institutional mission (CR 2.4)
- Faculty (CR 2.8 and CS 3.7.1)
- Learning resources and services (CR 2.9)
- Institutional Effectiveness: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes (CS 3.3.1.1)
- Academic program approval (CS 3.4.1)
- Admission policies (CS 3.4.3)
- Acceptance of academic credit (CS 3.4.4)
- Practices for awarding credit (CS 3.4.6)
- Consortial relationships/contractual agreements (CS 3.4.7)
- Institutional credits for a degree (CS 3.5.2 and CS 3.6.3)
- Student records (CS 3.9.2)
- Physical facilities (CS 3.11.3)
- Substantive change (CS 3.12.1)
- Program curriculum (FR 4.2)
- Publication of policies (FR 4.3)
- Program length (FR 4.4)
- Student complaints (FR 4.5)
- Recruitment materials (FR 4.6)
- Distance and correspondence education (FR 4.8), if applicable
- Definition of credit hours (FR 4.9)
- Policy: Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures
- Policy: Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions
- Policy: Distance and Correspondence Education (if applicable)

### **Reporting Responsibilities and Procedures When Developing Agreements for Dual Academic Awards**

**Prior Notification:** Entering into an agreement with a member or non-member institution involving a dual academic award is a substantive change that requires an institution to submit a letter of notification six months prior to implementation of the agreement and a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written acceptance of that notification and agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a dual academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date of the agreement, a description of the agreement, the complete address/location of the parties involved in the agreement, and information for contact persons at each participating institution regarding the agreement.
- A copy of the final signed agreement.

## **Reporting Responsibilities and Procedures When Developing Agreements for Joint Academic Awards**

Participating in agreements involving the offering of joint academic awards (as defined above) falls into three categories. Reporting responsibilities differ depending on the accreditation status of the institutions which are partnering with the SACSCOC member institution.

**Category One:** A SACSCOC member institution and partner institutions that are all SACSCOC accredited

**Prior Notification by Each Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with partner institutions which are all SACSCOC accredited institutions is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written acceptance of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date of the agreement, a description of the agreement, the complete address/location of the parties involved in the agreement, and information for contact persons at each participating institution regarding the agreement.
- A copy of the final signed agreement.

**Category Two:** A SACSCOC member institution and at least one partner institution that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accreditor other than SACSCOC

**Prior Notification by SACSCOC Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with at least one partner institution which is accredited by a USDOE-recognized accreditor other than SACSCOC is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement along with the required documentation listed below and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written approval of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A letter of notification that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated implementation date for the agreement, a description of the proposed agreement, the address/location of each institution involved in the agreement, and information for the contact person at each participating institution
- A copy of the final signed agreement
- Documentation that the non-SACSCOC partner institution is not on a public sanction with its accreditor
- Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)
- Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
- A plan to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets SACSCOC expectations

- A plan and process produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the agreement and awarding of a joint award does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media. (See the disclaimer statement above.)
- Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) involved in the agreement.

**Category Three:** A SACSCOC member institution and at least one partner institution that is not accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor

**Prior Notification by SACSCOC Member Institution:** Entering into a *joint* academic award agreement with at least one partner institution which is not accredited by a USDOE-recognized accreditor is a substantive change that requires (1) submission of prior notification at least six months in advance of implementation of the agreement along with the required documentation below and (2) a final signed copy of the agreement. Formal, written approval of the agreement by SACSCOC is required before implementation of the provisions of the agreement. (See note at the end of this policy for additional requirements if the agreement involves a new program which is significantly different from currently offered programs or an off-campus site where students may earn 50 percent or more of the credit in a program.) Expectations are that the agreement will reflect assumption of responsibility on the part of the SACSCOC member institution for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript and accepted toward a *joint* academic award. The following should be submitted to SACSCOC:

- A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date for the agreement, a description of the proposed agreement, the address/location of each institution involved in the agreement, and information for the contact person(s) at each participating institution
- A copy of the final signed agreement
- A description of (1) any external governmental or accrediting agency approval for the institution(s) or program(s) involved in the agreement, excluding the SACSCOC institution(s), (2) the process of quality assurance used by the agency granting this approval, and (3) any required legal or licensing approvals
- Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)
- Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
- Documentation that faculty involved in the collaboration are qualified to teach assigned components or courses and a description of the means by which the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) will monitor these qualifications (Submit a completed SACSCOC Faculty Roster Form.)
- Documentation describing the physical and learning resources that will support the collaboration
- A plan and process to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets applicable SACSCOC requirements A plan and process produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the agreement does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media. (See the disclaimer statement above).
- Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) involved in the agreement

When necessary to ensure compliance with SACSCOC requirements, SACSCOC may request additional information concerning any of these agreements involving joint and dual academic awards.

**Note:** *If the joint or dual academic award arrangement involves offering 50 percent or more of a program at a previously unapproved off-campus site by a member institution or involves offering a new program which is significantly different from currently offered approved programs, notification is due six months prior to the implementation date with a prospectus for approval due at least three months prior to implementation.*

**Document history**

*Note: Previously called "Collaborative Academic Arrangements"*

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