



POLICY & PROCEDURE DOCUMENT

NUMBER: 0.4016

DIVISION: General University

TITLE: Substantive Change

DATE: April 2, 2012

REVISED: February 26, 2013, January 11, 2016, December 2, 2019, February 14, 2022, November 13, 2023, April 1, 2025

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I. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets forth the requirements faculty, administrators, and staff must follow when implementing program or institution-wide modification or expansion that could constitute a substantive change as defined by Western Kentucky University's accrediting body.

A. Definition of Substantive Change

1. WKU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which defines a substantive change as a "significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution." Per SACSCOC Policy, "(s)ubstantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs and services." A more detailed explanation of SACSCOC requirements and a list of specific types of changes that constitute a substantive change can be found at <https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes>.

B. Types of Change that may Constitute Substantive Change

1. Program changes that could result in substantive change include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Addition of programs that represent a significant departure from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated

- b. Addition of programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or reaffirmation
 - c. Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.
 - d. Adding an additional method of delivery, changing a delivery method, or closing a delivery method to a currently offered program.
 - e. Substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program
 - f. Establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 25% of an educational program
 - g. Closing a program leading to a credential (any program leading to a degree or certificate), closing a delivery mode for a program, or closing the delivery of a program at an off-site location.
 - h. Reopening a program or off-campus instructional site.
 - i. Adding competency-based education programs and/or competency-based education programs using prior learning credit or direct assessment.
 - j. Adding programs with completion pathways that recognize and accommodate a student's prior knowledge or competency.
 - k. Entering a cooperative academic arrangement.
 - l. Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement that includes only the initiation of a dual or joint academic program with another institution.
 - m. Entering into a contract by which an entity not eligible for Title IV funding offers 25% or more of one or more of the accredited institution's programs.
2. *Institution-wide changes* that could result in substantive change include, but are not limited to, the following:
- a. Change in the established mission or objectives of the institution or its programs.
 - b. Change in legal status, form of control, or ownership of WKU.
 - c. Changing the governance of an institution.
 - d. Merging/consolidating with another institution or entity.
 - e. Relocating an institution or an off-campus instructional site of an institution (including a branch campus).
 - f. Change from credit hours to clock hours or change from semesters to quarters or trimesters, or non-time-based methods or measures.
 - g. Closing an off-campus instructional site, branch campus or institution.
 - h. Acquiring another institution or a program or location of another institution.
 - i. Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out program for a closed institution.

II. Policy

1. Any unit within WKU that intends to make a change to its curricular offerings that may be substantive, must take due steps to notify the WKU SACSCOC Liaison prior to implementation of the change.

2. If the change does constitute a substantive change, Academic Affairs will ensure that appropriate notification to SACSCOC occurs.

III. Procedure

A. Responsibilities

To ensure compliance with this policy,

1. The SACSCOC Liaison will:
 - a. Develop and maintain a website with examples of substantive changes at: http://www.wku.edu/academicaffairs/pd/sacs_substantive_changes.php
 - b. Provide the deans, department chairs/directors, faculty, and staff information about the substantive change policy;
 - c. Monitor programmatic additions and changes that proceed through the curriculum change process;
 - d. Identify those proposed changes that require notification to the SACS Commission on Colleges; and
 - e. Work with WKU department chairs/directors and deans to determine if proposed changes constitute a substantive change.
2. Department chairs/directors and deans are responsible for:
 - a. Completing, in a timely manner, the form for changes in programs under their charge, including joint and dual award programs; and
 - b. Working with the SACSCOC Liaison to gather relevant information to complete the notification/approval process of a substantive change to SACSCOC.
3. The SACSCOC Liaison will monitor changes to programs as they add or remove instruction at off-campus sites where programs or dual credit courses are offered and add or remove program delivery modes and liaise with pertinent departments about programs to determine whether substantive changes have occurred.
 - a. If substantive changes have not occurred, the SACSCOC Liaison will continue monitoring, or
 - b. If substantive changes have occurred, the SACSCOC Liaison will follow the procedures to report the substantive changes to SACSCOC and other regulatory entities as appropriate.

4. The Associate Provost for Global Learning and International Affairs will monitor international academic arrangements and will work with the SACSCOC Liaison to determine whether revisions to programs constitute substantive changes.
5. For substantive changes that are institution wide change (i.e., I.B.2.), the Provost will work in conjunction with the President to inform SACSCOC in a timely manner of those changes, following the procedure and guidelines as posted on the SACSCOC website.
6. In the event that the Office of the Provost becomes aware that a substantive change has been made prior to notifying SACSCOC, the WKU SACSCOC Liaison will work with SACSCOC to notify them of the unreported change, following pertinent SACSCOC policies. The SACSCOC Liaison will work with the department/school and college to develop a preventative plan for future unreported changes.

B. Processes

1. Those unsure if an action or actions require WKU to notify SACSCOC of a substantive change should contact the SACSCOC Liaison for clarification and consultation.
2. When a unit within WKU intends to make a change to its curricular offerings, the appropriate coordinator should work with the SACSCOC Liaison to make sure that the appropriate parties are notified in a timely manner and adjust implementation dates as recommended by the SACSCOC Liaison.
3. As soon as the decision is made that an action may constitute a substantive change, department chairs/directors or deans should contact the SACSCOC Liaison to begin the substantive change process, determine the implantation timeline, and adhere to the SACSCOC Liaison's deadlines for timely submission to SACSCOC.
4. The WKU SACSCOC Liaison, in consultation with the Provost, will
 - a. Liaise with SACSCOC to determine which SACSCOC procedures should be followed;
 - b. File the appropriate notification and/or prospectus as deemed necessary;
 - c. Coordinate any follow-up actions required of Western Kentucky University by SACSCOC.

IV. Related Policies

1.413V *Course Section Delivery Mode Definitions and Relationship to Distance Education*

V. Reasons for Revision

February 2013

Changes to I.B.1., I.B.2., and III.A.3 due to SACSCOC requirement changes effective January 1, 2013.

January 2016

Changes to II.1, III.A, II.B.1, II.B.3 and non-substantive changes as part of the five-year policy review per Policy 0.000V Policy on Policies.

December 2019

Revisions reflect personnel changes within the Office of the Provost.

November 2021

Revisions to align with SACSCOC.

February 2022

Revisions to align with SACSCOC.

November 2023

Move policy from Academic Affairs to General University and updated to incorporate the dissolution of DELO.

April 2025

In order to update WKU policy to align with changes to SACSCOC policy on Substantive Change made in December 2024.