

Substantive Change Policy¹

Elon University

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Elon University’s SACSCOC Accreditation Responsibilities

Elon University is responsible for ensuring compliance with the policies established by our regional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges or SACSCOC, and federal regulations. Reporting and seeking approval for substantive changes is part of ongoing SACSCOC compliance and is intended to ensure the integrity of Elon University’s education programs and accreditation.

Communication with SACSCOC

Communication with SACSCOC related to substantive changes is done through the Provost and Executive Vice President, Elon’s SACSCOC institutional liaison. The Associate Provost for Curriculum and Assessment is responsible for answering questions, consultations regarding substantive changes, collaborating with departments/programs/schools/college on SACSCOC submissions, and preparing materials for the SACSCOC institutional liaison.

Depending on the nature of the change and associated SACSCOC procedure, approval of substantive changes may require 6 months or more.

What is 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 but is not limited to the following:

¹ Large portions of this document not directly related to Elon are taken verbatim from the following SACSCOC documents: Substantive Change and Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards.

- Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution (editorial changes that do not reflect a “material” change in mission are not substantive changes).
- Change in program level. Elon is authorized to grant particular degrees up to doctorate. However, degrees below a bachelors (including certificates) may require approval. Additionally, specialist graduate degrees embedded in a program may require approval.
- Cooperative academic arrangements with an institution or organization to deliver program content that would be recorded on Elon’s transcript as its own.
- Adding a method of delivery to an existing program.
- The addition of a new program that represents a significant departure (50-100% new content)
- The addition of a new program that represents a significant departure (25-50% new content)
- Closing a program (ending a major).
- Program designed for prior learning as a requirement for admission.
- The addition of courses or programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution’s current accreditation or reaffirmation.
- A substantial change in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program (change in program length (25% change in credit hours; or increase by one term the time required for completion).
- Re-opening a closed program within 5 years of the closure.
- The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.
- Establishing an additional location at which 25-49% of a program’s instruction is delivered.
- Closing or relocating an off-campus site, branch campus or institution
- Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement that includes the initiation of a dual or joint academic program with another institution (includes offering dual or joint academic degree completion awards – certificates, diplomas, or degrees) **SEE THE SECTION ON ACADEMIC AGREEMENTS**

Additional substantive changes are defined by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Consequently, it is generally best to inquire about whether a change requires SACSCOC notification or approval well in advance of implementing the change.

The complete SACSCOC Substantive Change policy can be found [here](#).

Elon University Substantive Change Process

The following is an overview of Elon’s process for ensuring compliance with SACSCOC policies related to Substantive Change. The process applies to all units of the university with responsibilities for curricular programs and collaborative academic arrangements. Academic arrangements include educational programs, consortial agreements, affiliations, articulation agreements, and agreements involving dual or joint academic awards (certificates, diplomas, degrees, or transcripts).

1. All academic programs will be reviewed in relationship to SACSCOC substantive change guidelines as part of the Curricular Review process. The Provost’s office will contact any unit proposing curriculum that may require submission to SACSCOC.
2. Individuals leading feasibility studies for new programs should contact the Provost’s office early in the process to discuss accreditation implications.

3. For any change likely to require a prospectus, the initiators of the change should carefully review the requirements for a prospectus to ensure that the required information is addressed while considering the change.
4. Prior to signing any academic agreement (and preferably early in the consideration of such an agreement) the appropriate unit(s) must email the Provost's office to initiate a discussion of the accreditation implications and requirement.
- 5. For any program/agreement requiring SACSCOC approval, all advertising and materials for the program including information on websites or academic catalogs must include the following statement:
*Pending approval by SACSCOC.***
6. After the institution is notified of formal SACSCOC approval, the Provost's office will notify the proposing unit, admissions, and university communications, and the disclaimer may be removed from all materials.

Submission of Documentation to SACSCOC

Any unit initiating either a program or agreement that requires submission to SACSCOC must collaborate with the Provost's Office to prepare the necessary SACSCOC documents.

Units initiating either a program or agreement will be expected to fully participate in ensuring compliance with institutional and SACSCOC policies including following university curriculum policies and SACSCOC requirements for disclaimers related to advertising, the agreement, faculty credentials, student learning assessment, etc.

Types of Substantive Changes and Procedures

There are two procedures for addressing different types of substantive changes:

1. Approval Prior to Implementation.
2. Only Notification Prior to Implementation (some changes also require submission of additional documents).

The table below provides descriptions of select (more common) substantive changes and the SACSCOC procedures, policies, and timelines associated with each. Please be aware that some changes require the submission of a prospectus detailing the change in relation to accreditation standards. For some changes, other factors will determine the type of review and the appropriate deadline.

Type of Change	Prior Notification	Prior Approval	Prospectus	Other information
New Program (major or university certificates but not minors) with 25-50% new content	X			
Method of Delivery (adding a new method to an existing program e.g., adding an online option)	X			

Type of Change	Prior Notification	Prior Approval	Prospectus	Other information
New Program with 50-100% new content (applies to majors, university certificates but not minors)		X (executive council)	X	Deadlines January 1 for July-December implementation in the same year July 1 for implementation January-June of the next year.
Program Closure (applies to majors and university validated certificates). Also required if ending a delivery method or option at a location is ended		X (executive council)		Must submit a teach-out plan Deadlines January 1 for July-December implementation in the same year July 1 for implementation January-June of the next year.
Program Length Change (25% change in credit hours, or change by a semester the time to completion)		X (executive council)	X	Deadlines January 1 for July-December implementation in the same year July 1 for implementation January-June of the next year.
Cooperative Academic Arrangement				Varies based on how much of a program will be offered by the partner entity and other factors.
Off Campus Instructional Site (25-49% of a program)	X			
Off Campus Instructional Site (50% or more of a program)		X (executive council)	X	Site visit may be required. Deadlines January 1 for July-December implementation in the same year July 1 for implementation January-June of the next year.
Off-Campus Instructional Site Relocation, Name Change, or Address Change	X			
Off-Campus Instructional Site Closure		X (executive council)		Teach out plan. Deadlines January 1 for July-December implementation in the same year July 1 for implementation January-June of the next year.

Academic Agreements

Dual Degree: students study at two or more institutions and each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature.

Joint Degree: 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. Joint award agreements require special considerations. Consequently, consultations prior to entering into discussions with another institution are required.

For agreements with institutions that are not accredited by SACSCOC, the following disclaimer statement must be included in the agreement:

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

Process

The unit initiating the agreement is responsible for the following:

- Articulating how the agreement is consistent with mission of Elon University and endorsed in principle by the appropriate dean/administrator prior to entering into discussions regarding an agreement.
- Developing the agreement in consultation with the partner institution.
- Ensuring that agreement is consistent with SACSCOC policies.
- For completing the Academic Agreement cover sheet and submitting the draft agreement for approval to the appropriate dean and/or administrator, University Registrar, and Provost’s office.
- Securing all necessary signatures from Elon University and partner institution on the approved agreement.
- Submitting the signed agreement to the Provost’s Office. The initiating unit should keep a copy of the agreement.
- Providing the Provost’s office with any necessary documentation related to SACSCOC.
- Ongoing monitoring and updating of the agreement as necessary and/or specified in the agreement. (It is preferable to include in the agreement, when it will be reviewed with a reasonable timeframe).

SACSCOC Policies Regarding Academic Agreements Resulting in Academic Awards

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 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 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: Generally, most requirements and standards in the *Principles of Accreditation* related to faculty, institutional effectiveness, facilities, resources, and curriculum should be considered when developing the agreement, documentation of compliance, and, if relevant, a substantive change prospectus. Some of those principles are listed below:

- Integrity (P 1.1)
- Institutional mission (R 2.1)
- Faculty (R 6.1 and R 6.2.b)
- Learning resources and services (R 11.1)
- Institutional Effectiveness: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes (R 7.1)
- Academic program approval (R 10.4)
- Admission policies (R 10.5)
- Acceptance of academic credit (R 10.8)
- Practices for awarding credit (R 10.7)
- Consortial relationships/contractual agreements (R 10.9)
- Institutional credits for a degree (R 9.4 and R 9.5)
- Student records (R 12.5)
- Physical facilities (R 13.7)
- Substantive change (R 14.2)
- Program curriculum (R 9.1)
- Publication of policies (R 10.2)
- Program length (R 9.2)
- Student complaints (R 12.4)
- Recruitment materials (R 10.5)
- Distance and correspondence education (R 10.6.a.b.c.), if applicable
- Definition of credit hours (R 10.7)
- Policy: Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures
- Policy: Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions
- Policy: Distance and Correspondence Education (if applicable)

SACSCOC Prospectus

A number of substantive changes require a prospectus (see the table above). The Provost's Office determines (in consultation with SACSCOC) whether a prospectus is required. If required, the completion of a prospectus requires significant work and collaboration between the initiating unit and the Provost's office with the initiating unit expected to provide drafts of various components of the prospectus. The following provides a general idea about the information required for a Prospectus but each type of Prospectus may differ. The Provost's office will provide additional clarification based on the type of change and the SACSCOC policy (which is available on this website – Prospectus Content is detailed in the Appendix of the SACSCOC Policy).

The following is verbatim from the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy (appendix pp. 57-60).

Common Content A – Background and Context

1. A Substantive Change Cover Sheet [PDF].
2. A transmittal letter signed by the CEO or institutional liaison briefly explaining the submission.
3. A list of programs offered by the institution (excerpt from the catalog or a printout of a webpage is acceptable).
4. Abstract (one page maximum)
 - a. Briefly describe the proposed change to include the proposed implementation date.
 - b. Provide projected number of students, if applicable.
 - c. Indicate the projected life of the change, as applicable: one-time/limited duration or ongoing).
 - d. Describe the primary target audience or market.
 - e. Describe the strengths of the institution to undertake the change.
5. Describe how the need for the change was determined and how the change was approved by the institution.
6. Describe how the change is consistent with the mission and goals of the institution.
7. Provide documentation of faculty involvement in the planning and approval of the change.
8. Provide evidence of legal authority for the change if approval is required by the governing board or the state

Note for reviews subject to approval by the Executive Council: If the change is pending approval by the institution's governing board or by a state board or authority, note the expected approval date. The institution will be contacted at the time of review for evidence of approvals pending at the time of submission; do not send approval documentation until requested.

Note for review subject to approval by the full Board of Trustees: Evidence of all required approvals must be included with the original submission.

Common Content B – Faculty Qualifications

1. Provide a completed Faculty Roster Form for faculty members scheduled to teach in the new program, site, or method of delivery. Follow directions for completing the Faculty Roster which requires the institution to present the qualifications of each faculty member to teach the courses assigned to them. Provide courses to be taught in the first year of the new program or site; do not include historical teaching assignments.

- a. Faculty Roster Form (*provided by the Provost's office*)
- b. Faculty Roster Form Instruction (*provided by the Provost's office*)

2. For a new program, demonstrate the institution has at least one faculty member qualified in the discipline to develop the curriculum and or teach in the program (Refer to Standard 6.2a (Faculty qualifications) of the Principles of Accreditation. To-be-hired faculty can be included on the Faculty Roster with expected qualifications for teaching the courses assigned.

3. Provide narrative with supporting evidence that the number of full-time faculty members will be adequate to support the initiative and describe the impact on faculty workload of the new program, new site, or distance delivery.

Common Content C – Resources

Library and Learning Resources

1. List and describe discipline-specific learning resources to support a new program. Do not list all library resources, include only those related to the proposed change. If electronic databases are listed, describe the discipline-specific suites of resources rather than the name only of the database or the consortium through which it is accessed (Such as Galileo, Louis, TexShare, Viva, etc.)

2. Document discipline-specific refereed journals and primary source materials. This is particularly important for graduate programs and especially important for doctoral programs.

3. Describe how students enrolled in a new program, at an off-campus instructional site, or in a distance education program can access discipline-specific library and learning resources.

4. Describe how students are made aware of library and learning resources available to them, how they can learn how to access the resources and are instructed in the use of online resources, as well as on-site library resources.

5. Describe resources to support students in access to and use of library and learning/information resources.

Student Support Services

1. Describe specific programs, services, and activities which will support students enrolled in the new program and / or enrolled at a new off-campus site /additional location and / or enrolled in distance education programs. Do not list student support services which are not relevant to the specific change.

Physical Resources

1. Describe the adequacy of physical facilities which will support the change.
2. Describe equipment which will be available for a new program or available at a new site.
3. Describe the impact that the proposed change will have on physical facilities and equipment for existing programs and services.

Financial Resources

1. Describe the financial resources available to support the proposed change, including a budget for the first year of the proposed change. For a new branch campus, a three-year budget is required. Do not send the institutional budget.
 2. Include in the budget resources going to institutions or organizations for contractual or support services for the proposed change.
 3. Include projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow for the proposed change.
 4. Include a contingency plan in case expected revenues do not materialize.
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Common Content D – Institutional Evaluation and Assessment Processes

1. Provide a brief description of institutional assessment processes.
2. Describe how the institution will incorporate the proposed change into the institution-wide assessment infrastructure and processes.