



## **SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE PROCEDURE**

### **Substantive Change Notification Process**

Athens State University welcomes and encourages the expansion of educational opportunities through the development of new programs, innovative instructional delivery methods, and the availability of program offerings on and off-campus.

In the pursuit of expanding educational opportunities, Athens State University is committed to full compliance with all policies and procedures mandated by the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), its regional accrediting body.

Particularly relevant to the expansion of educational opportunities is the possibility that proposed modifications and/or new initiatives may deviate significantly from existing programs or conditions, thus affecting the institutional nature and scope. Since it is the Commission's responsibility to determine the effect of a substantive change on the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the institution, *SACS Substantive Change Policy* requires all accredited institutions, including Athens State University, to file a Substantive Change Request prior to implementation.

Failure to comply with this policy may carry severe consequences for the institution as shown under Principle 3.12 of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, which states: "If an institution fails to follow the Commission's procedures for notification and approval of substantive changes, its total accreditation may be placed in jeopardy."

Responsibility for notifying SACSCOC of proposed substantive changes rests with the President. The Director of the Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment (OIPRA), under the authority of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs (PVPAA), and working with the Accreditation Liaison Officer, coordinates and facilitates the process.

A substantive change is defined by SACS as "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 substantial increase in the number of 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 percent of an educational program.
- The establishment of a branch campus"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the SACS policy: *Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges*, July 2010.



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#### **INTERNAL PLANNING AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE**

##### **1. New programs, degrees, certificates or significant changes to the length of a program or certificate.**

Substantive changes are initiated through the planning process at the University (Strategic Planning Committee), College, and Department levels. When a substantive change is under consideration, the planning process is initiated by the Department Chair/Program Coordinator working in conjunction with the College Dean.

##### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Department Chair/Program Coordinator: Responsible for ensuring that all required approvals and notifications are received prior to scheduling or marketing courses or programs that will require substantive change. Each Department Chair or Program Coordinator should keep on file copies of substantive change requests, notifications, and SACS approvals for each program, location (off-campus site) and delivery format (online) in which the program is offered.

College Dean: Responsible for ensuring that no substantive change is implemented without the prior approval of the program through the internal and external processes. College Deans are also responsible for notifying the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs at the time the program change planning process begins, normally 12-18 months before a substantive change implementation is sought.

Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs (includes the Accreditation Liaison Officer): Responsible for managing the approval process and ensuring that approvals and notifications are completed on time. Based on delegated authority by the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Director of OIPRA will ensure that records related to all substantive change transactions are kept and that College Deans are informed of the status of SACS approvals.

##### **Substantive Change Planning and Approval Phase**

Faculty proposing curriculum changes should follow the Athens State University Curriculum Review Process.

**Step 1:** At the time that a substantive change is being considered, the College Dean or designee must complete and submit electronically the ***Substantive Change Checklist Form (1500-0916A)***. This electronic form alerts OIPRA/PVPAA of the initiation of a substantive change action. A printed copy of the completed form should be included in the documentation submitted to the Curriculum Committee by the program. The form is located in the Substantive Change webpage

[http://24.athens.edu/prod8/asu\\_utility.p\\_open\\_file\\_by\\_seqno?p\\_seqno=2534](http://24.athens.edu/prod8/asu_utility.p_open_file_by_seqno?p_seqno=2534)

**Step 2:** PVPAA/OIPRA will notify all pertinent offices of the initial receipt of the planned change and outline the approval process specific to the substantive change plan.



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**Step 3:** The College Dean in coordination with the Department Chair/Program Coordinator prepares the **Substantive Change Prospectus (1500-0916B)**. The template is located in the Substantive Change webpage

[http://asu-ssb.athens.edu/apex/prod8/asu\\_utility.p\\_open\\_file\\_by\\_Seqno?p\\_seqno=2140](http://asu-ssb.athens.edu/apex/prod8/asu_utility.p_open_file_by_Seqno?p_seqno=2140)

- The Substantive Change Prospectus is part of the required documentation to be presented to the Curriculum Committee. Curriculum changes that qualify as substantive changes will NOT be approved by the Curriculum Committee without a prospectus.
- If the curriculum change is approved, the Chair of the Curriculum Committee will copy the prospectus that accompanied the request for approval by the Curriculum Committee and forward a copy of the prospectus to the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Director of OIPRA, and the Accreditation Liaison officer.
- The Director of OIPRA and the Accreditation Liaison, as authorized by the PVPAA, will review the document and will recommend changes, if needed, to the PVPAA.
- The PVPAA/OIPRA notifies the President that the substantive change proposal is ready for submission to SACS. The President or his designee prepares the cover letter and the package is sent to SACS via certified mail.
- The final package consist of the following documentation: (1) Original President's Cover Letter; (2) Substantive Change Prospectus; (3) Faculty Roster, and (4) any other documentation as required. All documents will be submitted in hard copy and a CD containing all documentation. A copy of the Substantive Change Package will be kept on file in OIPRA.

### **Substantive Change Implementation Phase**

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

## **2. New facilities or instructional sites**

Consistent with SACS Substantive Change Policy, Athens State University must ensure that the name and address of every instructional site at which it offers class credit is reported to SACS.

**Step 1:** The President or his designee secures all external approvals of new facilities or instructional sites and maintains appropriate records. External approvals may be required from the Alabama Commission of Higher Education (ACHE), the State Board of Education (SBE), the State Department of Education (SDE), and the Alabama Community College System (ACCS).

- When a new facility or instructional site is approved, the PVPAA notifies the College Deans, the Vice President for Enrollment and Student Support Services (VPSSS), the Accreditation Liaison Officer, and the OIPRA Director who must initiate the



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coordination of a substantive change request. Further actions will be dependent on the percentage of credits toward the program that a student may earn in the new facility/instructional site as follows:

- 25% - 49%: The President will notify SACS at least 6 month prior to implementation
- 50% or more: A Substantive Change Prospectus will be submitted and implementation will be initiated following SACS' approval

**Step 2:** The PVPAA or his designee must complete and submit electronically the **Substantive Change Checklist Form (1500-0916A)**. The form is located in the Substantive Change webpage

[http://24.athens.edu/prod8/asu\\_utility.p\\_open\\_file\\_by\\_seqno?p\\_seqno=2534](http://24.athens.edu/prod8/asu_utility.p_open_file_by_seqno?p_seqno=2534)

**Step 3:** The PVPAA and the VPESSS in coordination with College Deans prepare the **Substantive Change Prospectus (1500-0916B)**. The template is located in the Substantive Change webpage

[http://asu-ssb.athens.edu/apex/prod8/asu\\_utility.p\\_open\\_file\\_by\\_Segno?p\\_seqno=2140](http://asu-ssb.athens.edu/apex/prod8/asu_utility.p_open_file_by_Segno?p_seqno=2140)

- A copy of the prospectus is sent to the Director of OIPRA, and the Accreditation Liaison Officer.
- The Director of OIPRA and the Accreditation Liaison Officer, as authorized by the PVPAA, will review the document and will recommend changes, if needed, to the PVPAA.
- The PVPAA/OIPRA notifies the President that the substantive change proposal is ready for submission to SACS. The President or his designee prepares the cover letter and the package is sent to SACS via certified mail.
- The final package consist of the following documentation: (1) Original President's Cover Letter; (2) Substantive Change Prospectus; (3) Faculty Roster, and (4) any other documentation as required. All documents will be submitted in hard copy and a CD containing all documentation. A copy of the Substantive Change Package will be kept on file in OIPRA.

### Substantive Change Implementation Phase

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



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#### **3. Changes in Method of Instructional Delivery**

New methods of instructional delivery involve significant departure from those assessed when the institution was most recently accredited. Examples of these delivery methods include distance learning and any other substantive deviation from traditional (face-to-face) instruction.

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/or instructional sites. Further actions will be dependent on the percentage of credits toward the program that a student may earn in the new facility/instructional site as follows:

- 25% - 49%: The President will notify SACS at least 6 months prior to implementation
- 50% or more: A Substantive Change Prospectus will be submitted and implementation will be initiated following SACS' approval

Please refer to required documentation stated in Steps 1-3 in #2 above. Implementation of new delivery methods is dependent on SACS prior approval.

#### **4. Other Types of Substantive Change**

The Commission considers other institutional actions as substantial deviation from those assessed when the institution was most recently accredited. These include:

- **Initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level (Graduate Programs)**
- **Contractual Agreements**
- **Non-credit offerings that affect the institutional mission**
- **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 SACS.

Processes for filing a Substantive Change Request for these actions are the same as stated throughout this document. Please refer to required documentation stated in Steps 1-3 in #2 above. Implementation of these changes is dependent on SACS prior approval.



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#### **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Substantive Change Checklist Form**

**Appendix 2: Substantive Change Prospectus Template**