



## **Institutional Policy for Reporting Substantive Changes 1500-0916**

### **Introduction**

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 accrediting body.

This policy states the institutional responsibilities for compliance with the SACS-COC Substantive Change Policy and details the internal processes that guide the notification and approval process.

### **Definition of Substantive Change**

Athens State University is required to file a Substantive Change Request with the COC whenever changes are planned that qualify as substantial in nature as defined by the Commission.

Substantive changes may occur at any time and are not tied to, nor an integrated part of, the 10-Year Reaffirmation of Accreditation or of other reports due to the SACSCOC on a regular basis.

Substantive change as defined by the COC is a “significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution”<sup>1</sup>. The Commission considers many different types of change to be substantive and therefore, review and approval prior to the proposed change is required.

Examples that would most likely trigger the need for a Substantive Change Request include, but are not limited to:

- New courses or programs that deviate significantly either in content, delivery method, or higher academic level from those offered at the time of the last reaffirmation of accreditation.

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges Policy Statement, pg 1

- Establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus (Off-Campus Sites) where the institution offers at least 50% of an academic program
- Changes in the established institutional mission or goals, legal status, or control
- A program entering into a contractual agreement with another organization to provide certain aspects of an existing degree.

## **Procedures for Reporting Substantive Changes**

The COC stipulates three procedures for addressing the different types of substantive change as follows:

- Procedure One for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Notification and Approval prior to implementation.
- Procedure Two for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Only Notification prior to implementation.
- Procedure Three for the Review and Approval of Consolidation and Mergers.

## **Substantive Change Requests**

Substantive Change Requests are submitted to SACS by the President of Athens State University via a Notification Letter detailing the proposed change and the accompanying Substantive Change Prospectus. The Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment (OIPRA), under the authority of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and in coordination with the Accreditation Liaison, supports the requesting unit or program by handling the interaction with the Commission and working to clarify SACS' expectations for each specific situation.

Pursuant to SACS Substantive Policy, the following actions should be taken as appropriate.

- All institutional procedures appropriate to the specific change for which notification and/or approval is sought must be followed. Approval of the proposed change by the appropriate senior level official should be obtained in writing previous to the development of the Substantive Change Prospectus and the initiation of a Substantive Change Request.
- The Substantive Change Prospectus must be submitted to OIPRA at least two months prior to the date the Notification Letter and the Substantive Change Prospectus are due to SACSCOC. OIPRA, in coordination with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Accreditation Liaison, will provide additional information, review the submission, and provide feedback to the designated lead program officer.
- Submission of the Substantive Change Request Package to SACS must be made via Certified Mail containing the following documents:
  - Original Cover Letter Signed by the President

- Hardcopy of the Substantive Change Prospectus and supporting documentation
- CD (electronic copy) containing all documents

**OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION FROM SACS IS REQUIRED PRIOR TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY PROPOSED CHANGE.**

**Format of Substantive Change Prospectus**

Substantive Change Requests must be submitted using the *SACS Substantive Change Prospectus Template* accessible via the SACS website

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Substantive%20change%20policy.pdf>

The Substantive Change Prospectus must provide information in the following areas:

- Statement of the nature and purposes of the activities, including relevance to the current institutional mission, evidence of need for the proposed activity, financial impact of the proposed change, and the legal authorization to conduct the program or activity, if required.
- Intended constituency
- Governance and administrative organization
- Plans for the assessment of student learning outcomes
- Records of institutional procedures followed in approving the activities
- Copies of contractual arrangements or publications announcing and/or describing the planned activities, if available.

In addition, the Prospectus may include basic planning documents including the budget and other information showing adequate financing for the projected activities; provisions for needed resources (faculty, library, facilities, etc.); and analysis of the impact of the proposed change(s) on the rest of the institution.