SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy sets forth the steps and requirements for faculty, administrators, and staff to monitor substantive changes occurring within academic programs at Mercer University and for the University to report such changes to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC).

Definition of Substantive Change
Substantive change is a federal term for any “significant modification of the nature and scope of an accredited institution.” SACSCOC is required by the federal government to monitor compliance with the substantive change policy and to approve any major changes.

II. POLICY

Mercer University is responsible for notifying SACSCOC of substantive changes in a timely manner, and, when required, seeking SACSCOC approval up to six months before implementing the change.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Notification
Mercer University will notify the SACSCOC of substantive changes in accordance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of such changes. Notification by the University means that the President of Mercer University shall send a letter to the President of the SACSCOC that describes the proposed substantive change, identifies the implementation date, and includes the physical address when the change involves an off-campus site. Depending upon the substantive change, as directed in the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy, communications with SACSCOC may include either only notification from the University in the form of a letter describing the substantive change prior to implementation, or notification and required documentation from the University submitted as many as twelve months prior to implementation and approval by SACSCOC prior to implementation. In the event that a substantive change has been implemented without notification of and/or approval from SACSCOC, Mercer will formally notify the SACSCOC President upon discovery of the unreported substantive change.

B. Assigned Responsibility
1. The President
The President shall submit all substantive change correspondence from the University to the President of SACSCOC.
2. The Institutional Accreditation Liaison
   Overall responsibility for insuring the University’s compliance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy is assigned to the Institutional Accreditation Liaison. The Liaison is responsible for monitoring campus substantive changes and initiating reporting of substantive changes. This includes working with the Graduate Council and the University Undergraduate Curriculum Council, the Deans Council, the President’s Executive Council, and other University bodies as appropriate to ensure that the University is in compliance with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy. The Liaison shall annually inform campus agencies of the substantive change policy and request instances of substantive changes anticipated or planned for the upcoming 12-month period. The Liaison shall prepare appropriate letters of correspondence to the President of SACSCOC for execution by the President of Mercer University. If a prospectus is required by SACSCOC, the Liaison will coordinate with the deans and other senior administrators to prepare the prospectus for the President to submit to the President of SACSCOC.

3. Program Officers (associate deans, chairs, program directors, etc.)
   Administrators with responsibility for programs are responsible for understanding the substantive change policy for the purpose of identifying substantive changes and reporting them appropriately to the Accreditation Liaison.

4. Deans and Vice Presidents
   Deans and Vice Presidents are responsible for enforcing this policy within their respective schools/colleges and divisions.

5. Provost
   The Provost is responsible for enforcing all policies pertaining to the areas of academic affairs, including the substantive change policy.

IV. Resources

SACSCOC Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges

Types of Changes and Reporting Requirements

A. Changes requiring SACS approval prior to implementation: Most of these changes require a letter of notification at least six months prior to the planned implementation and all require SACS approval prior to implementation. The prospectus is due three months prior to the start date. See the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy for more detailed information.

1. Initiating coursework, certificates, or programs at a different level than currently approved. (Application required.) (This will not be relevant to Mercer, unless we decide to offer an associate degree made up of courses that are not already part of an existing baccalaureate degree. Twelve-month notification window required.)

2. Expanding at current degree level (significant departure from current programs). (Prospectus required.) See definition of “significant departure” below.
3. Initiating a branch campus. (Prospectus required.)

4. Initiating a certificate program for workforce development at the request of an employer and on short notice, if the certificate is at a new off-campus site or if it is a significant departure from previously approved programs. (Modified prospectus required.)

5. Initiating other certificate programs that are a significant departure from currently approved programs or that will be offered at a new off-campus site. (Prospectus required.)

6. Initiating joint degrees with another institution not accredited by SACSCOC. (Prospectus required.)

7. Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution.

8. Initiating off-campus sites at which students can obtain 50% or more credits toward a program. (Prospectus required. If the program(s) being taken to the new site are already offered at three of more approved sites, a modified prospectus may be submitted in lieu of the full prospectus.)

9. Initiating degree completion programs. (Prospectus required.)

10. Altering significantly the length of a program, substantially increasing the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program. Significant changes in program length are those with noticeable impact on the program’s completion time. (Prospectus required.)

11. Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs, if the entity provides 25% or more of an education program offered by Mercer. (Prospectus required.)

12. Initiating a merger/consolidation with another institution. (Prospectus required; due April 15 or September 15.)

13. Acquiring any program or site from another institution. (Prospectus required.)

14. Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out for students from another institution that is closing. (Prospectus required.)

15. Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status of an institution. (Prospectus required; due April 15 or September 15.)

16. Relocating a main or branch campus. (Prospectus required.)

17. Changing from clock hours to credit hours. (Justification and calculation of equivalency required.)
18. Closing a program, approved off-campus site, branch campus, or institution. (Teach-out plan and letter of notification required immediately following decision to close.)

B. Changes requiring a letter of notification to SACSCOC prior to implementation (approval not required):

1. Initiating joint degrees with another SACSCOC accredited institution. (Copy of signed agreement and contact information required.)

2. Initiating dual programs with another institution. (Copy of signed agreement and contact information required.)

3. Initiating off-campus sites at which students can obtain at least 25% but less than 50% of credits toward a program.

4. Moving an approved off-campus instructional site within the same geographic area to serve essentially the same pool of students.

5. Initiating program/courses delivered through contractual agreement or a consortium. (Copy of the signed agreement required.) This provision does not apply to articulation agreements with other institutions, clinical agreements, or internship agreements.

6. Entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs if the entity provides less than 25% of an educational program offered by Mercer. (Copy of signed agreement required.)

7. Repackaging of an existing approved curriculum to create a new degree level.

C. Changes that do not require SACS notification or approval:

1. Adding approved programs (significantly different or not) to an approved off-campus site.

2. Adding approved programs to the institution’s electronically delivered offerings, if the institution is already approved to offer distance education. (Mercer is.)

3. Adding a new program that is not a significant departure from currently approved programs. (See definition of “significant departure” below.)

4. Initiating a certificate program using existing approved courses at an approved site.

5. Initiating off-campus sites where students can obtain no more than 24% of the required credits for a program.

6. Initiating a non-credit program that does not qualify for federal aid.

Definition of “Significant Departure” – a program that is not closely related to previously approved programs at the institution or site or for the mode of delivery in question. To
determine whether a new program is a “significant departure,” it is helpful to consider the following questions:

- What previously approved programs does Mercer offer that are closely related to the new program and how are they related?
- Will significant additional equipment or facilities be needed?
- Will significant additional financial resources be needed?
- Will a significant number of new courses be required?
- Will a significant number of new faculty members be required?
- Will significant additional library/learning resources be needed?

See the Glossary of Terms in the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy document for other definitions. If you are unsure about whether a planned change is substantive, contact the institutional SACS liaison to discuss.

**Prospectus**

**Modified Prospectus** for certificate programs at employer’s request: must include name of the certificate; date of implementation; the complete physical address of the off-campus site (if applicable); a faculty roster; a discipline-specific description of library/learning resources; a description of physical facilities; and descriptions of courses to be offered as part of the certificate.

Approved April 9, 2013
President William D. Underwood