



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

CORE REQUIREMENT 3.1.b: DOCUMENTING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Policy Statement

Standard 3.1.b of the Principles of Accreditation states:

An institution seeking to gain or maintain accredited status...offers all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees.

Institutions which do not meet this requirement may request an exception to the standard by documenting an alternative approach. This alternative approach might involve accepting course work completed through arrangements such as consortia, articulation agreements, contractual relationships with other institutions or organizations, or assessment of transfer credit.

If an institution does not offer all course work for at least one degree at each degree level, it must request approval and provide documentation for an alternative approach in the following situations:

- An institution applying for membership should provide documentation as part of its application.
- An institution offering a degree at a new level – a graduate institution offering a new bachelor’s degree completion program, for example – should provide documentation as part of the application for substantive change.

If there is an articulation agreement, consortium or another kind of cooperative agreement involved in the degree program, the institution must obtain agreement from the other institutions or organizations that are parties to the arrangement to provide accreditation information to the Commission at times when the institution is being evaluated.

When applying to SACSCOC for approval of an alternative approach, the institution should provide evidence that it controls all aspects of its educational program. Evidence should demonstrate that the institution:

1. evaluates effectively all aspects of each of the degrees for which the alternative approach is requested and that it maintains quality and coherence in those programs, including the general education component and the major or concentration for undergraduate programs, and that it identifies expected outcomes for the programs.
2. ensures appropriate prerequisites and sequences of courses and fulfillment of the completion requirements.
3. uses academically-qualified persons to effectively assess and monitor courses and components completed at other institutions.

4. ensures that the total degree program, including extra-institutional coursework or components, meets the requirements of the Comprehensive Standards for all Educational Programs and those for faculty.

Procedures

Institutions already accredited by SACSCOC with an approved alternative approach for this standard do not need to address this standard in their Compliance Certification unless the underlying conditions have changed. If the previously approved alternative approach is directly relevant to a different standard, however, that standard’s narrative should include an explanation of how the alternative approach ensures compliance. Normally, the institution is not required to reapply for approval of its already approved alternative approach to document compliance with this standard.

For an institution expanding programs or moving to a new degree level as part of substantive change, the document seeking approval of an alternative approach should be submitted as a separate document with its prospectus for change. The document should clearly be labeled as a “Request for approval of an alternate approach for Standard 3.1.b” and should address each of the requirements identified in the policy. It will be reviewed by a standing committee of SACSCOC Board of Trustees and will be forwarded to the Board with a final recommendation.

Document History

Adopted: Commission on Colleges, June 2001

*Updated in accord with the revised Principles: December 2006 Revised:
Commission on Colleges, June 2007*

Revised: Executive Council, December 2010

Updated in accord with the revised Principles: March 2018

Edited: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2023