SEEKING ACCREDITATION
AT A HIGHER OR LOWER DEGREE LEVEL

Policy Statement

SACSCOC member institutions must seek approval to offer educational programs at a higher or lower degree level than their current level of approval. In most instances, such applications will be reviewed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at either its June or December meeting. Institutions may not offer coursework at a higher level prior to approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. All programs included in the institution's application must meet the relevant standards and be approved by the Board for the institution to be accredited at the new level.

The institution will be designated as a member at the new level upon the Board's approval. Institutions should also ensure that their official statement of accreditation by SACSCOC reflects the newly-approved level. Institutions must implement the new program(s) within two years of the Board's awarding of membership at the new level, and the institution must formally inform the SACSCOC President of the date of implementation. The institution should also inform its assigned SACSCOC Vice President. If the institution does not implement the new program(s) – including embedded Associates or Specialists degree – within the two year period, the institution must inform the SACSCOC President. In this case the SACSCOC Board will take action to rescind the institution's membership at the new level or extend the institution's time for implementation.

As part of the approval process, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees will authorize a Substantive Change Committee to conduct a visit no more than six months following the initiation of the new program(s). This Committee is charged with determining the institution's ongoing compliance with selected standards following the implementation of coursework at the new degree level. Institutions may not initiate additional educational programs at the new level until after that Committee's report has been reviewed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

In accord with the SACSCOC's *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, all applications for accreditation at a higher or lower level – including those exceptions noted below – for institutions currently on sanction (Warning or Probation) or subject to Substantive Change Restriction will be reviewed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at either its June or December meeting.

Exceptions

Embedded Associate degree(s). Baccalaureate-granting institutions may choose to combine lower-division coursework ***already being offered*** into an Associate degree. Such cases would not constitute a significant departure in terms of curriculum, faculty, or other resources, since the institution is already offering the

courses comprising the new degree. Review of membership at Level I in these cases would normally be conducted by SACSCOC staff and submitted to the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for approval. Subsequent review by a Substantive Change Committee would not normally be authorized following staff review and Executive Council approval.

Baccalaureate-granting institutions seeking approval to offer an Associate degree comprised of coursework that is significantly different from their current lower-division coursework would be required to submit an Application for Level Change that is reviewed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at its June or December meeting. The Board's approval of such a program and award of membership at Level I would not normally include the authorization of a Substantive Change Committee.

Embedded Specialist degree(s)[1]. Although rare, some institutions already approved for a Doctorate of Education (EdD) might not have sought approval to offer the Specialist in Education (EdS) degree at the time the EdD was approved. Such institutions may subsequently choose to combine graduate-level coursework already being offered as part of the EdD into a coherent Specialist degree. Review of membership at Level IV in these cases would normally be conducted by SACSCOC staff and submitted to the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for approval. Subsequent review by a Substantive Change Committee would not normally be authorized.

NOTE: Staff review and Executive Council consideration is the normal pathway for a prospectus seeking approval of an "embedded" Associate or Specialist degree program. Institutional information revealed in the prospectus may, however, result in a decision to refer the prospectus to one of the Standing Committees on Compliance and Reports for its review and a final recommendation to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees (See *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* [Review Procedures | Staff Options]). In addition, in accordance with SACSCOC's policy on *Unsolicited Information*, evidence of significant non-compliance with one of the Core Requirements or Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* will be considered for appropriate action irrespective of the decision to approve or deny the institution's application for accreditation at a higher or lower level.

PROCEDURES

Closing and Teaching Out All Coursework at an Approved Level. When an institution decides to discontinue its educational program(s) and coursework at an approved level, the institution must send official notification to SACSCOC. The process of closing such programs may involve a teach-out, and the member institution must comply with all of the applicable requirements of SACSCOC's *Substantive Change Policy and* Procedures. As part of the process of reviewing the notification and any other documentation, SACSCOC will remove the institution's approval to offer coursework at the applicable degree level. The member institution should also ensure that its published statement(s) regarding its SACSCOC accreditation accurately reflect that change.

Should an institution decide to reinstate such a previously discontinued program within three (3) years of the date the teach-out was approved by SACSCOC, the institution may do so by submitting official notification to SACSCOC. The reinstated program(s) must be substantially the same as those previously discontinued. Any program(s) that constitute a significant departure would require the institution to submit

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[1] This exception **only** applies to a Specialist's degree that is embedded in an existing doctoral-level curriculum. Institutions wishing to initiate a Specialist's degree that represents a significant departure from existing programs must seek approval through the normal application process. A Substantive Change Committee would normally be authorized following approval of the degree to review the institution's ongoing compliance with selected standards.

a new level change application. Any decision to reinstate prior programs or begin new ones at the previously-approved degree level after the three (3) year window has expired would also require the institution to submit a new level change application for review.

Degree Level Designations. SACSCOC uses the following roman numerals to designate institutional degree levels:

Level I............................Associate's degree
Level II...........................Baccalaureate degree
Level III ....Master's degree
Level IV ....Specialist's degree
Level V ....Three or fewer doctoral degrees
Level VI.........................Four or more doctoral degrees

SACSCOC commonly categorizes member institutions by the designation corresponding to the institution's highest degree level course offerings. The highest degree level offered by the institution does not automatically include authorization of the institution to offer coursework or program at all lower levels; i.e., the institution's highest degree level is not inclusive of authority to offer courses or programs at all lower degree levels. For example, a Level V institution is not automatically authorized to offer undergraduate coursework or programs; a Level II institution is not automatically authorized to offer the associate degree. Authorization to offer coursework or programs at a given level is explicitly approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. An institution unsure of its coursework or program level authorizations should consult the SACSCOC website or email its SACSCOC staff representative; this information is publicly disclosed for all institutions on the SACSCOC website.

Moving from Level V to Level VI. The distinction between membership at Level V and membership at Level VI is determined by the number of doctoral programs being offered by an institution. Level V institutions offer three or fewer doctorates. Level VI institutions offer four or more doctorates. Membership at Level VI is awarded automatically following the approval of the institution's fourth doctoral program. Institutions submitting a prospectus for their fourth doctoral program should clearly indicate on the Substantive Change Cover Sheet that approval of the program would result in their being designated as a member at Level VI.

LEVEL CHANGE APPLICATION

Due dates:
- For consideration by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees in June: **March 15**
- For consideration by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees in December: **September 1**
- For review by SACSCOC staff and the Executive Council of the Board of Trustees; implementation in fall: **January 1**
- For review by the SACSCOC staff and Executive Council of the Board of Trustees; implementation in the spring/summer: **July 1**

INSTRUCTIONS

When initiating *coursework or programs* at a higher or lower degree level than currently approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), an institution must upload the following documents: (1) "Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Review" and (2) a Substantive Change Cover Sheet, and (3) the "Application for a Member Institution Seeking Accreditation at a Higher or Lower Degree Level."

These documents constitute a primary source of information used by SACSCOC to award membership at the new degree level.

Reminders. When completing the application, please adhere to the following:

1. In cases in which year-end financial information is requested, use the most recently completed fiscal year. Report enrollment information for the most recent academic year.
2. Use "NA" to mark items not applicable to the institution.
3. The institution *must upload all* before its case will be forwarded for action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAMS/COURSES
TO BE OFFERED AT THE NEW DEGREE LEVEL

Name(s) of New Degree Program(s).
Please be specific (e.g., Bachelor of Arts degree in English). *(**Note:** Only programs or coursework submitted for review at the new degree level will be included in the approval by the Board of Trustees.)*

Alternate locations where the new degree program will be offered. *If the proposed programs/courses are to be offered at off-campus instructional sites, list each specific location, its address, the mode of delivery, and the percentage of the educational program that will be offered at each site.*

General Institutional Information

Name of agency that has legally authorized the institution to provide the new degree program: *(Provide charter/letter of authorization from appropriate agency/organization indicating that the institution may award the new degree.)*

Date institution plans to enroll first students at the new degree level: *(Implementation date will be included as part of the action by the Board.)*

Date institution projects it will graduate the first regular class at the new degree level:

Enrollment Data
Headcount Enrollment - Please refer to your most recent completed SACSCOC Institutional Profile and report the following enrollment data (for the institution) for most recent fall term:

Fall of _____

1. Full-Time Undergraduate Students – Headcount	
2. Full-Time Post-Baccalaureate Students – Headcount	
3. For-Credit, Part-Time Undergraduate Students – Headcount	
4. For Credit, Part-Time Post-Baccalaureate Students – Headcount	
5. Students enrolled in non-credit courses – Headcount	
6. Total Headcount (Total of 1-5)	

Projected Enrollment - Please indicate below the number of students projected to enroll in the new degree program(s):

1. Full-Time Enrollment (headcount)	
2. Part-Time Enrollment (headcount)	
3. Non-Credit Enrollment (headcount)	
4. Projected Total	

Proposed Programs/Courses at the New Degree Level

1.   **Rationale and need**. Describe the rationale for the new program(s), including an assessment of need.

2.   **Financial resources**.
   a. A projected budget for the new programs (revenues and expenses) for the first three years of operation (**CR 13.1** and Standard 13.3)
   b. A copy of the full audit from the most recent audited fiscal year (**CR 13.2**)

3.   **Compliance with selected standards**.

   2.1   **The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.**
   (Institutional mission) **[CR]**
   [As part of the response, clarify that the mission statement is inclusive of the expansion to a new program at a higher degree level.]

   Narrative:

   5.4   The institution employs and regularly evaluates administrative and academic officers with appropriate experience and qualifications to lead the institution.
   (Qualified administrative/academic officers)

   Narrative:

   6.2   For each of its educational programs, the institution

      6.2.a   Justifies and documents the qualifications of its faculty members.
         (Faculty qualifications)
         [Display faculty qualifications on the Commission's "Faculty Roster Form."
         Limit entries to those faculty members assigned to the new programs(s). For

graduate programs, include documentation of the scholarship and research capability of faculty. For doctoral programs, include documentation of faculty experience in directing dissertation research.]

Narrative:

6.2.b   Employs a sufficient number of full-time faculty members to ensure curriculum and program quality, integrity, and review.
(Program faculty)
[The narrative should only address the impact of the program expansion (new programs and affected existing programs – e.g., include information on the impact of staffing at the lower degree level(s) in related fields of study). As part of the response, include a discussion of the impact of the program expansion on faculty workload. Identify new faculty hired to support this initiative.]

Narrative:

6.2.c   Assigns appropriate responsibility for program coordination.
(Program coordination)
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

8.2   The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

8.2.a   Student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.
(Student outcomes: educational programs)
[As part of the response, include a description of how the institution is monitoring the quality of the new program(s). Summarize current procedures for the assessment of learning outcomes and achievement, and how results are being or will be used to improve the new programs. Include relevant information about existing related programs that may serve as indicators of the institutional effectiveness process that apply to the new program(s).]

Narrative:

9.1   **Educational programs (a) embody a coherent course of study, (b) are compatible with the stated mission and goals of the institution, and (c) are based on fields of study appropriate to higher education.**
(Program content) **[CR]**
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

9.2 **The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. The institution provides an explanation of equivalencies when using units other than semester credit hours. The institution provides an appropriate justification for all degree programs and combined degree programs that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit.**
(Program Length) **[CR]**
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

9.4 At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for an undergraduate degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree.
(Institutional credits for an undergraduate degree)
[Address 9.4 only if the institution has moved from level I to level II]

Narrative:

9.5 At least one-third of the credit hours required for a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree.
(Institutional credits for a graduate/professional degree)
[Address 9.5 only if the level change involves programs at the graduate-level.]

Narrative:

9.6 Post-baccalaureate professional degree programs and graduate degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs, and are structured (a) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (b) to ensure engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training.
(Post-baccalaureate rigor and curriculum)
[Address 9.6 only if the level change involves programs at the graduate-level]

Narrative:

9.7 The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate professional programs, as applicable. The requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.
(Program requirements)
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

10.4 The institution (a) publishes and implements policies on the authority of faculty in academic and governance matters, (b) demonstrates that educational programs for which academic credit is awarded are approved consistent with institutional policy, and (c) places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty.
(Academic governance)
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

10.5 The institution: (a) publishes admissions policies consistent with its mission; (b) ensures that its recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices, policies, and accreditation status; and (c) ensures that independent contractors or agents used for recruiting purposes and for admission activities are governed by the same principles and policies as institutional employees.
(Admissions policies and practices)
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

10.7 The institution publishes and implements policies for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for its courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. These policies require oversight by persons academically qualified to make the necessary judgments. In educational programs not based on credit hours (e.g., direct assessment programs), the institution has a sound means for determining credit equivalencies.
(Policies for awarding credit)

Narrative:

10.8 The institution publishes policies for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit not originating from the institution. The institution ensures (a) the academic quality of any credit or coursework recorded on its transcript, (b) an approval process with oversight by persons academically qualified to make the necessary judgments, and

(c) the credit awarded is comparable to a designated credit experience and is consistent with the institution's mission.
(Evaluating and awarding external academic credit)
[Emphasize aspects of this standard that may have special relevance to the program expansion at the new degree level.]

Narrative:

11.1 **The institution provides adequate and appropriate library and learning/information resources, services, and support for its mission.**
(Library and learning/information resources) **[CR]**
[The narrative should only address the new programs.]

Narrative:

11.3 The institution provides (a) student and faculty access and user privileges to its library services and (b) access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.
(Library and learning/information access)

Narrative:

12.1 **The institution provides appropriate academic and student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission.**
(Student support services) **[CR]**
[The narrative should address the appropriateness of student support services available to students at the new degree level.]

Narrative:

12.4 The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written student complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be accessed upon request by SACSCOC.
(Student complaints)

Narrative:

13.7 The institution ensures adequate physical facilities and resources, both on and off campus, that appropriately serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities.
(Physical resources)

[The narrative should emphasize facilities relevant to the new program(s).]

Narrative: