



Commission on Colleges  
 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
 1866 Southern Lane  
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## SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

### - Policy Statement -

**Definition:** Substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Notification constitutes a letter from the institution’s chief executive officer to the President of the Commission summarizing the proposed change, providing the intended implementation date, and listing the street address, if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site. The policy and procedures for reporting and review of institutional substantive change are outlined below.

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## The Policy

### ***Commission Responsibilities***

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accredits an entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located or however they are delivered. It is responsible for reviewing all substantive changes that occur between an institution’s decennial reviews to determine whether or not the change has affected the quality of the total institution and to assure the public that all aspects of the institution continue to meet defined standards.

In addition, the Commission on Colleges is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an agency whose accreditation enables its member institutions to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV programs. To maintain its recognition with the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission on Colleges has incorporated federal requirements into its substantive change policy and procedures. Some of those requirements expect an institution to seek approval prior to the initiation of a substantive change so that the change can be included in the institution's scope of accreditation.

### ***Institutional Responsibilities***

It is the responsibility of an institution to follow the substantive change procedures of the Commission and inform the Commission of such changes in accord with those procedures. If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation. The Commission on Colleges accredits institutions not systems. While a system may provide the Commission with important information regarding changes planned or underway at its institutions, it is expected that each institution will follow the reporting requirements of the substantive change policy.

### ***Procedures for Reporting: An Overview***

There are three procedures for addressing the different types of substantive changes:

1. Procedure One for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring *Notification and Approval Prior to Implementation*
2. Procedure Two for the Review of Substantive Changes Requiring *Only Notification Prior to Implementation*
3. Procedure Three for the Review and Approval of *Consolidations/Mergers*

### ***Reporting the Various Types of Substantive Change***

The different types of substantive change, the specific procedure number to be used for each, their respective approval/notification requirements, and their reporting time lines are included in the graph that follows. Please refer to the appropriate Procedure for details regarding reporting.

| <b>Types of Change</b>   | <b>Procedure</b> | <b>Prior Approval Required</b> | <b>Prior Notification Required</b> | <b>Time Frame for Contacting COC</b> |
|--|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced level than currently approved       | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 12 months                            |
| Expanding at current degree level ( <i>significant departure from current programs</i> ) | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Initiating programs at a lower degree level  | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Initiating a branch campus   | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |

| <b>Types of Change</b>   | <b>Procedure</b> | <b>Prior Approval Required</b> | <b>Prior Notification Required</b> | <b>Time Frame for Contacting COC</b> |
|--|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Initiating Off-campus Sites...   |                  |                                |                                    |                                      |
| ...Student can obtain 50 percent or more credits toward program  | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| ...Student can obtain 25-49 percent of credit  | 2                | No                             | Yes                                | Prior to implementation              |
| ...Student can obtain 24 percent or less   | NA               | NA                             | NA                                 | NA                                   |
| Adding significantly different programs at an approved site ( <i>only if programs are currently approved</i> )   | 2                | No                             | Yes                                | Prior to implementation              |
| Initiating distance learning...  |                  |                                |                                    |                                      |
| ...Offering 50 percent or more of program<br>( <i>Subsequent programs do not need reporting unless they are significant departures from initially approved program(s).</i> ) | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| ...Offering 25-49 percent  | 2                | No                             | Yes                                | Prior to implementation              |
| ...Offering 24 percent or less   | NA               | NA                             | NA                                 | NA                                   |
| Initiating programs/courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium  | 2                | No                             | Yes                                | Prior to implementation              |
| Initiating a merger/consolidation  | 3                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Altering significantly the educational mission of the institution  | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Relocating a campus  | 2                | No                             | Yes                                | Prior to implementation              |
| Changing governance, ownership, control, or legal status   | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Altering significantly the length of a program   | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Initiating degree completion programs  | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |
| Closing an institution/program; initiating teach-out agreements ( <i>see Commission policy</i> )   | 1                | Yes                            | Yes                                | 6 months                             |

## **Required Committee Visits**

The following five types of substantive changes require on-site committee reviews within six months of implementation:

1. The initiation of an additional off-campus site/location offering an educational program at which a student can earn at least 50 percent of his/her credits toward the program, if any of the following applies: (a) the institution has a total of three or fewer additional locations, or (b) the institution has not demonstrated, to the Commission's satisfaction, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations, or (c) the institution has been placed on Commission sanction or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation.

The Commission will conduct visits to the first three off-campus locations of this kind initiated by an institution.

When an institution initiates its fourth off-campus site/location, the Commission may, at its discretion, authorize substantive change committees to review one or more of these additional locations. The Commission may choose not to conduct visits to any of these additional sites at the times of their initiation if the institution has previously demonstrated a record of effective oversight of its off-campus educational locations and has not been placed on sanction. The Commission, however, will require visits to a representative sample of sites at the fifth-year interval between scheduled reaffirmations if (1) the additional sites have been initiated since the last scheduled reaffirmation and (2) the sites have not been visited.

At any time, the Commission may choose to authorize visits to new sites developed between the fifth-year review and the next scheduled reaffirmation of accreditation.

At the time of reaffirmation, the Commission will conduct a thorough review of a representative sample of institutional locations/sites where a student can obtain 50 percent or more of course work toward an educational program. The extent of the review will depend in part on whether there has been a recent review of the sites.

2. The initiation of a branch campus. A branch campus is *defined as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature, (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential, (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization, and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.*
3. The initiation of a change in governance/ownership with a change in control.
4. The initiation of mergers/consolidations.
5. The initiation of coursework, certificates, or degree programs at a more advanced level than currently approved by the Commission.

The President of the Commission also is authorized to appoint a Substantive Change Committee to review an institution for any change requiring a more in-depth evaluation beyond the prospectus/application submitted by the institution. The report of the Substantive Change Committee will be used by the Commission to determine the ongoing accreditation of an institution.

In preparation for a Substantive Change Committee visit, the institution will be required to update its compliance with the *Principles* using a template which cites relevant Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements, and to distribute the completed document to visiting committee members in advance of their on-site review.

## **Policy Statements Regarding Substantive Change**

1. The *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* applies to all programs and services of COC-accredited institutions wherever they are located or however they are delivered. Failure to comply with the *Principles* or with procedures referred to in this policy could result in placing the institution on sanction or removing it from membership.
2. Denial of approval of substantive change is not appealable. An institution that fails to gain approval of the substantive change may resubmit a revised prospectus or application following the guidelines and time frames described in Procedures One and Two.  
  
An Institution failing to gain approval of a planned consolidation/merger shall maintain its separately accredited status with the Commission. However, if the institution continues with the change after denial of approval of the consolidation/merger, the institution's accreditation could be terminated.
3. The Commission's substantive change policy applies only to accredited institutions. Applicant and candidate institutions may not initiate substantive change until membership has been attained.
4. Procedures One and Two may not address all substantive changes that the Commission will review in the interim between an institution's reaffirmation cycles. Therefore, the Commission reserves the right to classify significant changes other than those described above as substantive in nature and to follow up accordingly. The follow-up procedure may include a committee visit.
5. An institution may withdraw its prospectus/ application or may discontinue substantive change at any time during the review process.
6. Although Commission staff may approve many of the substantive changes submitted by institutions and described in this policy, staff will automatically refer to the Commission the following cases requiring prior approval: (1) a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution currently on sanction, (2) a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution recently removed from sanction with particular attention for those involving non-compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1 or Comprehensive Standard 3.10.1 dealing with financial health, (3) a proposed substantive change submitted by an institution currently on reimbursement for Title IV federal funding, (4) an institution implementing a substantive change without securing prior approval, where required, (5) the application of an institution initiating coursework, certificates, or degree programs at a more advanced level than currently approved by the Commission, and (6) the prospectus of an institution planning a merger/consolidation.
7. All final decisions regarding the accreditation status of an institution are made by the Commission on Colleges. If an institution is removed from membership, the institution may appeal the decision to the Appeals Committee of the College Delegate Assembly. Denial of substantive change and the imposition of sanctions are not appealable actions.
8. Substantive changes of the types described in Procedures One and Two normally will not affect an institution's cycle of reaffirmation of accreditation. For merger/consolidation approvals, see Procedure Three, page 13.

## **Fees and Expenses**

- 1 Fees related to the review of an application/prospectus

The following fees will be assessed to institutions planning the initiation of a substantive change and requiring an application/prospectus review:

\$300 For an institution seeking review of a single substantive change prospectus

\$300 Per each type of substantive change submitted by an institution seeking review of a multiple proposal

- \$150 Per institution for a collaborative effort between two member institutions seeking review of a single prospectus
- \$100 Per institution for a collaborative effort among three or more member institutions seeking review of a single prospectus

2. Fees related to Substantive Change Committee visits

In addition to the fee assessed for reviewing the substantive change prospectus, the following fees will be assessed to an institution hosting a Substantive Change Committee visit:

- The actual cost of the committee  
(Includes travel, lodging, food, and related expenses), and
- 25 percent of the total cost of the committee

***Non-Compliance with Reporting Requirements***

If an institution fails to follow this substantive change policy and its procedures, the accreditation of the institution may be placed in jeopardy, the institution's case may be referred to the Commission for the imposition of a sanction, or the institution may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money received by the institution for unreported substantive changes.

*Adopted: Commission on Colleges, December 1999*  
*Revised: Executive Council, April 2001*  
*Revised for the Principles of Accreditation: February 2004*  
*Revised: Commission on Colleges, December 2006*

# PROCEDURE ONE

## The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Notification and Approval Prior to Implementation

### *Changes Requiring Notification and Approval*

Substantive changes requiring notification, submission of an application or a prospectus, and approval by the Commission on Colleges prior to implementation by the institution are as follows:

- Initiating coursework, certificates, or degree programs at a more advanced level than those previously approved by the Commission (Examples: an associate degree granting college initiating bachelor's degrees or a four-year institution initiating degrees at the master's level. Institutions may not offer individual credit courses or programs beyond the level of current accreditation). Institutions requesting a level change should complete an application for initiating programs at a more advanced degree level, *not* a prospectus.

The Commission classifies institutions according to the highest degree level offered by an institution. Those classifications are as follows:

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Level I   | Offers the associate degree as the highest degree                |
| Level II  | Offers the baccalaureate degree as the highest degree            |
| Level III | Offers the master's degree as the highest degree                 |
| Level IV  | Offers the master's and specialist degree as the highest degrees |
| Level V   | Offers three or fewer doctorate degrees as highest degrees       |
| Level VI  | Offers four or more doctorate degrees                            |

An institution adding a doctorate degree causing it to be reclassified from Level V to Level VI is not subject to this policy; however, the institution is required to inform the Commission of the additional doctorate in order for the Commission to reclassify the institution within the Commission's data base.

- Initiating an off-campus (additional) site (site-based/classroom group instruction) at which students can earn at least 50 percent of the credits toward the educational program.

Offering 25-49 percent of an educational program at an off-campus site does not require a prospectus; however, the institution is required to notify the Commission and also provide a faculty roster, a discipline-specific description of library/learning resources, a description of physical facilities, and a list of courses to be offered at the site.

- Initiating distance learning courses and programs by which students can earn at least 50 percent of a program's credits offered electronically.
- Initiating degree completion programs. (Example: adult or accelerated programs in management or organizational leadership)
- Initiating a branch campus. A branch campus is *defined as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature, (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential, (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization, and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.*
- Initiating any change of legal status, governance, form of control, or ownership of the institution. (Examples: change from private to public or from public to private, a change of ownership, a change in the legal status or form of control of the institution)

- Expanding at the institution's current degree level (*significant departure from current programs*). (Examples: adding a master's degree in nursing when the institution is accredited at Level III but currently offers only a master's degree in education; an institution accredited at Level II (bachelor's degrees), offering only a bachelor's degree with a major in religion, adding three new bachelor's degrees with majors in biology, business administration, and computer science)
- Initiating programs at a lower degree level—normally pertaining to programs that are significantly different from current degrees. (Examples: a graduate institution initiating degrees at the undergraduate level, a baccalaureate degree-granting institution initiating occupational and technical degrees at the associate degree level)
- Initiating any change in the established mission of the institution. (Examples: the transformation of a technical or specialized junior college into a comprehensive community college, the initiation by a seminary of significant liberal arts offerings, the addition by a medical college of general purpose offerings, the initiation of an engineering school at a liberal arts institution)
- Changing significantly the length of a program, substantially increasing the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program, or changing clock hours to credit hours. (Example: expanding a certificate program from 250 contact hours to 450 contact hours)
- Adding courses or programs that represent a significant departure, either in the content or method of delivery, from those offered when last evaluated by the Commission.
- Entering into a teach-out agreement or closing an institution. (See also the Commission policy "Closing an Institution or Program: Teach-Out Agreements.")

### ***Time of Notification***

The chief executive officer of an institution undergoing substantive change requiring prior approval must provide written notification of the change to the President of the Commission six months in advance of implementation of the substantive change. The only exception to this deadline is the initiation of programs offered at a more advanced degree level. This change requires twelve months advance written notification.

If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation.

### ***Submission of a Prospectus or an Application***

Upon notification, the President of the Commission will ask the institution to submit a completed prospectus if one has not been submitted. (In the case of an institution seeking approval of a change of degree level, the institution will complete an application—not a prospectus.) The prospectus must be submitted at least three months in advance of the planned implementation date to allow ample time for review and approval (for the application for degree level change, nine months). (Refer to the Appendix for a description of information to be included in the prospectus. For a copy of the application for level change, access [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org), click on "Resources" followed by "Institutional Resources.") *Please submit the completed application prospectus in print copy only.*

### ***Staff Options***

Upon receipt of an application for initiating coursework or programs at a more advanced degree level, the application automatically will be forwarded to the Commission on Colleges for review and approval at its next scheduled meeting: June or December. (See page 5, item 6, for a complete list of substantive changes automatically referred to the Commission for approval.)

Upon receipt of a substantive change prospectus not automatically referred to the Commission for approval, the Commission staff member will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted by the institution and will recommend to the President of the Commission one of the actions listed below.



1. accept the prospectus and approve the program, with or without a site visit, or
2. refer the prospectus to the Committee on Compliance and Reports (standing committee of the Commission) for review.

***Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports  
Following Review of the Prospectus or of the Application***

The application for offering more advanced degree programs is automatically referred to the Committees on Compliance and Reports. If the President of the Commission refers the prospectus to the Committee on Compliance and Reports, the Committee will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted, and will recommend one of the following actions:

1. accept the prospectus—or the application if the institution is initiating coursework, certificates, or degree programs at a more advanced level—and approve the program, with or without a site visit. A site visit is required within six months of the establishment of the following approved substantive changes:
  - (a) programs at a more advanced degree level
  - (b) consolidation/merger
  - (c) branch campus
  - (d) off-campus sites at which a student can earn at least 50 percent of courses of an educational program, if any of the following applies: the institution (1) has a total of three or fewer additional locations, or (2) has not demonstrated, to the Commission's satisfaction, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations, or (3) has been placed on Commission sanction or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation)
  - (e) a change of ownership resulting in a change of control.
2. defer action and seek additional information
3. deny approval of the substantive change and continue the institution's accreditation.

***Preparation for a Substantive Change Committee Visit***

When a Substantive Change Committee is authorized, it is charged to determine the institution's continued compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*. The visit will occur within six months of the implementation date. In preparation for this visit, the institution's Commission staff member will ask the institution to complete a substantive change template which cites relevant Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements. This template, in addition to roster of faculty members who will be teaching in the program, will be forwarded to the Committee in advance of its visit. The institution should use the Commission's "Faculty Roster Form" for reporting faculty qualifications. (See [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org) and click onto institutional resources.)

An institution may not initiate any additional degree programs at the more advanced degree level that would be considered substantive change until **after** the Commission has taken positive action on its continued accreditation following a Substantive Change Committee visit.

***Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports  
Following Review by a Substantive Change Committee***

The report of the Substantive Change Committee, together with the response of the institution to the recommendations contained in that report, will be reviewed by the Committee on Compliance and Reports. The Committee on Compliance and Reports may recommend one of the following actions:

1. continue the institution in accreditation, with or without a monitoring report, with or without sanctions of Warning or Probation
2. discontinue accreditation

## PROCEDURE TWO

### The Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Only Notification Prior to Implementation

#### ***Changes Requiring Notification Only***

Substantive changes requiring an institution to notify the Commission on Colleges prior to implementation by the institution are as follows:

1. For site-based/classroom group instruction (*where the instructor is present*)
  - a. Initiating an off-campus site at which a student may earn more than 25 percent and less than 50 percent of credits toward a program, thereafter reporting 50 percent or more of a degree program.
  - b. Adding significantly different degree programs (*approved for the institution*) at a currently approved off-campus site (*does not apply to new sites*)
2. For distance learning/technology-based group or individual instruction (*where the instructor and student are geographically separated*)
  - a. Offering credit courses via distance learning/technology-based instruction by which students can obtain at least 25 percent of their credits toward a degree program (*thereafter reporting 50 percent or more of a degree program or an entire degree program*)
  - b. Adding significantly different programs (*approved for the institution*) from previously reported programs offered through distance learning
3. Initiating significant changes in existing technology-based delivery systems in distance learning/ (*off-campus programs*)
4. Initiating programs/courses delivered through contractual agreement or consortium
5. Relocating a main campus

#### ***Time of Notification***

The chief executive officer of an institution undergoing substantive change must provide written notification of the change to the President of the Commission prior to implementation. If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation.

#### ***Staff Options***

Upon receipt and review of the substantive change notification, Commission staff will recommend one of the following options to the President of the Commission: (1) acknowledge receipt of the notification and indicate that the change will be included in the scope of the institution's accreditation or (2) acknowledge receipt of the notification and request additional information. Upon receipt of additional information, if requested, Commission staff may (1) acknowledge receipt of the additional information and include the change in the scope of the institution's accreditation, (2) refer the substantive change to the Commission for review, (3) authorize a substantive change visit, or (4) take other action as may be appropriate.

## PROCEDURE THREE

### Procedure for the Review and Approval of Consolidations/Mergers

#### **Definition**

The Commission on Colleges defines a consolidation as the combination or transfer of the assets of at least two distinct institutions (corporations) to that of a newly-formed institution (corporation), and defines a merger as the acquisition by one institution of another institution's assets. For the purposes of accreditation, consolidations and mergers are considered substantive changes requiring review by the Commission on Colleges. (Examples include: a senior college acquiring a junior college, a degree-granting institution acquiring a non-degree-granting institution, two junior or senior colleges consolidating to form a new institution, or an institution accredited by the Commission on Colleges merging with a non-accredited institution)

#### **Procedures for a COC Member Institution Initiating a Consolidation/Merger with another COC Member Institution (s)**

Time of Notification: The chief executive officers of the member institutions undergoing merger/consolidation must provide written notification of the change to the President of the Commission on Colleges six months in advance of the designated date for final approval of the consolidation/merger by the new institution's governing board. Upon notification, the President of the Commission or designated staff member will ask the institutions involved in the consolidation/merger to submit a combined written prospectus.

Submission of the Prospectus: The Commission on Colleges meets in the summer and in December. The prospectus for substantive change must be submitted to the Commission office by April 15 for review and consideration at the Commission's summer meeting in June, and by October 1 for consideration at the December meeting. The prospectus must describe how each institution plans to continue to meet the *Principles* while implementing the change. (Please refer to the Appendix for descriptions of information to be included in the prospectus.)

Review Process: The President of the Commission will forward the institutions' prospectus to the Commission on Colleges. If the prospectus is accepted, the Commission will approve the consolidation/merger of the institutions involved pending final approval by the new institution's governing board of the consolidation/merger. It also will authorize the appointment of a Substantive Change Committee to visit the new institution to determine ongoing compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*. The institutions involved in the consolidation/merger will be considered one accredited institution after the Commission has favorably acted on the prospectus and after the newly-formed institution has received final authority from its governing board.

The Substantive Change Committee visit will occur within six months of the Commission's approval and the board's final approval of the consolidation/merger. The report of the Substantive Change Committee, together with the response of the institution to any recommendations contained in that report, will be reviewed by the Commission on Colleges. Following review, the Commission will (1) continue the new institution in accreditation or (2) impose sanctions for failure to maintain compliance with the *Principles*.

If the Commission does not approve the prospectus for a consolidation or merger and the institutions do not proceed with the change, the COC-accredited institutions will maintain their separately accredited status. However, if they continue with the change without prior approval, they could lose their accreditation. The newly-formed institution may apply for accreditation with the Commission on Colleges in keeping with the Commission's procedures for applicant institutions.

Changes to the Reaffirmation Cycle: The newly consolidated/merged institution will be required to achieve reaffirmation of accreditation within five years following the Commission's action to continue accreditation. The institution will then maintain the normal ten-year reaffirmation cycle. If the Commission determines that the substantive change adversely affects each member's continued compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, the accreditation of all member institutions involved will be placed in jeopardy.

**Procedures for a COC Member Institution Initiating  
a Consolidation/Merger with a Non-COC Accredited Institution**

Time of Notification: The chief executive officer of the COC-accredited institution undergoing consolidation/merger must provide written notification of the change to the President of the Commission six months in advance of the designated date for final approval of the consolidation/merger by the new institution's governing board. Upon notification, the President of the Commission or designated staff member will ask the COC-accredited institution to submit a written prospectus.

Submission of the Prospectus: The Commission on Colleges meets in the Summer and in December. The prospectus for substantive change must be submitted to the Commission office by April 15 for review and consideration at the Commission's summer meeting in June, and by October 1 for consideration at the December meeting. The prospectus must describe how the member institution plans to continue to meet the *Principles* while implementing the change. *(Please refer to the Appendix for descriptions of information to be included in the prospectus.)*

Review Process: Upon receipt of the prospectus, the President of the Commission will refer it to the Commission on Colleges for review. Following review, the Commission will (1) accept the prospectus and authorize the appointment of a Substantive Change Committee to visit the institution, (2) deny acceptance of the prospectus, or (3) defer action to the next Commission meeting, pending submission of additional information.

If the prospectus is accepted, the institutions can begin implementation of the consolidation/merger. During this time, the accreditation status of the COC-accredited member institution will remain unchanged until after the consolidation/merger has been approved by the Commission.

A Substantive Change Committee visit will occur within six months of its authorization. The report of the Substantive Change Committee, together with the response of the member institution to any recommendations contained in that report, shall be reviewed by the Commission on Colleges. The Commission will (1) approve the consolidation/merger of the newly-formed institution, (2) deny the consolidation/merger for failure of the new institution to comply with the *Principles*, or (3) defer action.

If the Commission does not accept the prospectus for a consolidation/merger or the Commission does not approve the consolidation/merger following the visit by the Substantive Change Committee and the COC-accredited institution does not proceed with the change, the COC-accredited institution will maintain its separately accredited status. However, if the member institution continues with the change without prior or final approval, it could lose its accreditation with the Commission. The newly-formed institution may then apply for accreditation with the Commission on Colleges in keeping with the Commission's accreditation procedures for applicant institutions...

Changes to the Reaffirmation Cycle: The newly consolidated/merged institution will be required to achieve reaffirmation of accreditation within five years following the Commission's action to continue accreditation. The institution will then maintain the normal ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation cycle. If the Commission determines that the substantive change adversely affects each member's continued compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, the accreditation of the COC member institution involved shall be placed in jeopardy.

## APPENDIX

### The Content of the Substantive Change Prospectus

One print copy of a prospectus should be submitted to the Commission on Colleges and include all applicable information below regarding the change. The document should include concisely worded narrative with information specified in this appendix. Please note that the Commission on Colleges reserves the right to make amendments to the requirements outlined below for certain types of changes.

**Reminder:** An institution initiating a level change must complete an "Application Form" and submit it in quadruplicate *in lieu of completing a prospectus*.

#### Cover Sheet for Substantive Change Prospectus

- Include name, phone number, and e-mail address of person to be contacted with questions regarding the prospectus
- List all off-campus sites at which 50 percent or more of a program's credits are available
- List all off-campus sites at which 25-49 percent of a program's credits are available
- List programs for which 50 percent or more of the program's credits are approved for electronic delivery
- List degrees which institution is authorized to grant. As a subset of each degree, list majors available.  
(*Photocopy from catalog is acceptable*)
- List certificate and/or degree programs which are related to the proposed program(s)
- List institutional strengths which facilitate the offering of the proposed program(s)

1. **ABSTRACT** (limit to one page or less)

Describe the proposed change; list the street address, if the change involves the initiation of an off-campus site; initial date of implementation; projected number of students, if applicable; description of primary target audience; projected life of the program (single cohort or ongoing); and instructional delivery methods.

2. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Provide a clear statement of the nature and purpose of the change in the context of the institution's mission and goals; evidence of the legal authority for the change (if authorization is required by the governing board or the state); and whether the proposed degree program or similar program is offered on the main campus or at other off-campus sites.

3. **ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND PROGRAM PLANNING/APPROVAL**

Discuss the rationale for the change, including an assessment of need; evidence of inclusion of the change in the institution's ongoing planning and evaluation processes; and documentation that faculty and other groups were involved in the review and approval of the new site or program.

4. **DESCRIPTION OF THE CHANGE**

Provide a description of the proposed change, including the specific outcomes and learning objectives of the program, a schedule of proposed course offerings for the first year, and a copy of course syllabi. In the case of a change involving the initiation of a branch campus or of an off-site program, indicate the educational program to be offered. Describe any differences in admission, curriculum, or graduation requirements for students enrolled at the new site(s), or any special arrangements for grading, transcripts, or transfer policies. Describe administrative oversight to ensure the quality of the program or services to be offered.

5. **FACULTY**

Provide a complete roster (using the Faculty Roster form at [www.sacscoc.org/inst\\_forms\\_and\\_info1.asp](http://www.sacscoc.org/inst_forms_and_info1.asp)) of those faculty employed to teach in the program(s), including a description of those faculty member's academic qualifications and other experiences relevant to the courses taught, and course load in the new program as well as course work taught in other programs currently offered; evidence that faculty members are adequate to support the program; and the impact of the new initiative on faculty workload.

For distance learning programs, describe processes in place to ensure that students have structured access to faculty. For graduate programs, document scholarship and research capability of faculty; for doctoral programs, document faculty experience in directing student research.

6. **LIBRARY AND LEARNING RESOURCES**

Describe library and information resources—general as well as specific to the program—and staffing and services that are in place to support the initiative. If reliant upon other libraries, describe those collections and their relevance to the proposed program(s) and include a copy of formal agreements in the appendix. Relative to electronic resources, describe how students and faculty will access information, training for faculty and students in the use of online resources, and staffing and services available to students and faculty. For doctoral programs, document **discipline-specific refereed journals and primary source materials**.

7. **PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

Provide a description of physical facilities and equipment to support this initiative. Assess the impact that the proposed change will have on existing programs and services.

8. **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Provide a business plan that includes the following: (a) a description of financial resources to support the change, including a budget for the first year (a three-year budget is requested for a new branch campus); (b) projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow; (c) the amount of resources going to institutions or organizations for contractual or support services; and (d) the operational, management, and physical resources available for the change. Provide contingency plans if required resources do not materialize. For consolidations/mergers, and for institutions currently on sanction with the Commission for financial reasons, provide a copy of the most recent audit (audits from all institutions involved in consolidations/mergers).

9. **EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Describe how the institution assesses overall institutional effectiveness as well as the means used to monitor and ensure the quality of the degree program(s), off-campus site(s), or other changes. Summarize procedures for systematic evaluation of instructional results, including the process for monitoring and evaluating programs at the new site, as well as using the results of evaluation to improve institutional programs, services, and operations. For distance learning instruction or compressed time frames, describe the methodology for determining that levels of knowledge and competencies comparable to those required in traditional formats have been achieved.

10. **APPENDICES**

Appendices may include items such as (1) vitae of key faculty, (2) selected letters of support, (3) copies of library and other cooperative agreements, etc.