

# Guidelines for Identifying Substantive Changes

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**Authority:** Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

**History:**

**Related Policies:**

**Additional Resources:** [Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges, Policy Statement, August 18, 2011](#)

**Contact Information:** Associate Provost for Academic Program Planning and Development, 328-5358

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## Introduction

East Carolina University (ECU) recognizes that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires that substantive changes must be reported in a timely manner to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (CoC-SACS). Also, UNC policy requires that certain changes must be reported to and approved by the University of North Carolina General Administration (UNC-GA) prior to implementation.

1.1 ECU's Faculty Manual (Part V, Sec. III) has procedures for the approval of new academic programs, including the identification of whether a new program will be delivered off-campus or via distance education. These procedures involve review by and approval at the level of the department, school/college, graduate or university curriculum committee, Educational Policies and Planning Committee, Graduate Council or Faculty Senate, Academic Council, and Chancellor. Prior to

review by the Graduate Curriculum Committee or University Curriculum Committee (undergraduate), new degree proposals (face-to-face and distance education) are reviewed by the Academic Program Development Collaborative Team (APDCT), which recommends to the Academic Council whether faculty program planners should proceed through the campus approval process. Review by the APDCT also determines if the proposed degree program represents a substantive change for ECU. This above noted, on-campus process identifies a substantive change situation early on and allows time for submission of information to CoC-SACS. There is an additional, separate process for seeking approval by the UNC-GA and UNC Board of Governors before activation of a program.

1.2 The Division of Academic Affairs recognizes the need to formally present the approval steps for converting or expanding an existing program to a new off-campus location or online delivery mode.

1.3 The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for identifying substantive changes in academic programs in all cases and in a timely manor.

#### 1. New Programs:

The approval process for new degree programs in the all University of North Carolina institutions is described in the UNC Policy Manual Faculty Manual, Chapter 400.1. The on-campus ECU approval process is described in the university's Faculty Manual, Part V, Section III, Academic Program and Curriculum Development. UNC's Request for Authorization to Plan (RAP) form, which officially begins the degree planning phase inquires if the program is to be delivered at an off-campus site and/or via distance education (or online). The completed RAP document is reviewed by the APDCT; a standing member of the team is the associate director of the Office of Continuing Studies, Division of Academic Affairs. As part of the APDCT review, faculty planners are instructed to consult with the Office of Continuing Studies regarding preparation of planning and establishment forms for off-campus and online delivery. If the APDCT determines that the proposed degree represents a substantive change, this information is conveyed to the Academic Council and, a Substantive Change Report will be submitted to CoC-SACS by the Division of Academic Affairs.

#### 2. Converting Existing Programs:

Whereas the above procedures involve approval steps for new programs that will identify substantive change situations, the University makes a special effort to identify substantive changes that result when existing programs choose to deliver instruction via an off-campus and/or distance education delivery mode. Whereas individual courses might be delivered at off-campus locations or via distance education, the key criterion for identifying the change as substantive is whether 25% or more of a degree program credit is delivered (for the first time and when no similar program at a given level has previously been delivered) to an off-campus site and/or via distance education (including online).

The deans of our schools and college and the coordinators of the off-campus centers must be aware of the criteria for substantive changes. The Office of the Provost is ultimately responsible for informing SACS and UNC-GA and enforcing the procedural requirements. The Office of Continuing Studies and the deans are responsible for disclosing to the Provost and the Office for Academic Program Planning and Development of any instance where an existing academic program is planned for delivery in an off-campus location. This disclosure must occur at least eight months before planned implementation.

### 3. Creating Online or Distance Education Programs:

Any plan to offer at least 25% of the course work for a major program via any distance education modality (online or off campus or station-to-station video), through ECI's Office of Continuing Studies or any schools/college in any division, is reported to the Associate Director of Continuing Studies at least eight months before the course is delivered.

### 4. New Locations:

Any plan to offer courses at a new physical location, regardless of whether through our Office of Continuing Studies or schools/college, is reported to the Associate Director of Continuing Studies at least eight months before the first course is to be delivered. This applies whether the course will be delivered in person or via station-to-station video. The Provost may refer the plan to the APDCT for additional scrutiny.

### 5. Other Reportable Substantive Changes:

Any other potentially reportable substantive changes (e.g., initiating programs/courses offered through contractual agreement, adding significantly different degree programs at an approved site, discontinuing degree programs, adding or discontinuing certificates,

etc.) planned by the Office of Continuing Studies or the schools/college is reported to the Associate Provost for Academic Program Planning and Development at least eight months before the action.

6. Annual Review by the Office of Academic Program Planning and Development:

As a procedure to guard against unreported substantive changes and to chronicle notifications made to CoC-SCS, the Provost has instructed the Office of Academic Program Planning and Development and the Office of Continuing Studies to collaboratively review programs offered off-campus and via distance education. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Development maintains a log of all communications with CoC-SACS; the Office of Continuing Studies maintains records of all pending and current distance education programs. Sets of documents from both offices facilitates completion of this annual collaborative review. This review also involves projecting an estimate of whether more than 25% of a program can be obtained at a location and modality pertinent to the substantive change requirements. In any cases where the percentage of degree offering is questionable or appears to approach 25%, this annual review (completed by the Office of Academic Program Planning and Development and the Assistant Director of Continuing Studies) informs the Provost, who will determine, using available resources, whether a substantive change notification is required.

7. Annual Inventory of Programs:

The Office of the Provost also will make available an annual inventory of programs, including the location of their delivery and whether any surpass the 25% and 50% delivery levels, to the appropriate liaison at CoC-SACS.