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Substantive Change Reporting Policy and Procedure

Purpose of the Policy:

This policy is designed to ensure compliance with SACSCOC Standard 14.2 described in the *Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, and to ensure that the University, and each of its academic programs, operates within its mission and consistent with good practice in higher education (SACSCOC, 2024, p. 144). LMU's (2026a) mission specifically includes the statement, "By making educational, service, and research opportunities available to students, Lincoln Memorial University seeks to improve life for the students it serves. While serving students from throughout the state, nation, and many other countries, the University retains a commitment to enrich the lives of people and communities in the Appalachian region" (para. 10). Institutional Goal #13 declares the University seeks to, "Provide quality educational opportunities through selected degree programs for students who live and/or work a significant distance from the Lincoln Memorial University main campus, and for whom other options are not as accessible or satisfactory" (LMU, 2026b). Each academic unit and program mission statement is aligned with the institutional mission statement. If an academic unit or program revises its mission statement, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) will review the revision to ensure alignment with the institutional mission statement.

Policy

It is the policy of Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) to comply with the accreditation requirements for reporting substantive changes. To fulfill its obligation as a SACSCOC member institution, LMU will notify SACSCOC of changes in accordance with SACSCOC's *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of substantive changes.

This LMU policy was developed in recognition of the requirement for SACSCOC member institutions to have a policy and procedure to ensure that all substantive changes are reported to SACSCOC in a timely fashion.

LMU is responsible for complying with the *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* as a condition of its continued accreditation by SACSCOC. Substantive change is defined by SACSCOC (2026a) as "a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution" (p. 3).

The *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* states:

Substantive changes, including those required by federal regulations, include:

- Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.
- Changing the legal status, form of control, or ownership of an institution.
- Changing the governance of an institution.
- Merging / consolidating two or more institutions or entities.
- Acquiring any assets (e.g., programs or locations) of another institution.

- Offering courses or programs (i.e., credentials) at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.
- Adding graduate programs at an institution previously offering only undergraduate programs (including degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other for-credit credential).
- Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non-time-based methods or measures.
- Adding a program that is a significant departure from the existing programs, or method of delivery, from those offered when the institution was last evaluated.
- Initiating programs by distance education.
- Adding an additional method of delivery to a currently offered program.
- Entering into a written cooperative academic arrangement under 34 C.F.R. § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs. An agreement offering more than 50% of one or more of an institution's programs is prohibited by federal regulation.
- Substantially increasing or decreasing the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of one or more programs.
- Adding course-based competency-based education programs.
- Adding each competency-based education program by direct assessment.
- Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.
- Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.
- Closing an institution, a program, a method of delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.*
- Participating in the federal Prison Education Program providing Pell Grant access to confined or incarcerated students. (SACSCOC, 2026a, pp. 3-4)

Note:* If LMU plans to close a program, method of delivery, off-campus instructional site, or program at an off-campus instructional site, the University will follow the teach-out requirements of SACSCOC (and, as applicable, all programmatic accrediting and state licensing agencies) to ensure students experience minimal disruption. SACSCOC requirements include: a closure date (date when students are no longer admitted); communication plan to inform all affected parties (enrolled students, students with lapsed enrollment, prospective students, faculty, staff, and community/industry partners); signed copies of teach-out agreements with other institutions and all planned communication related to the teach-out agreements (if applicable); an explanation related to how students will be assisted while they complete the program of study with minimal disruption; an explanation of any additional charges or expenses related to the teach-out and how students will be notified of these charges; and a description of how faculty and staff will either be redeployed or assisted with finding new employment.

****Note:** At LMU, students with lapsed enrollment are defined as students who are not currently enrolled in a program but could reenroll without being required to apply for readmission. According to the LMU Student Leave of Absence Protocol, students may be granted a leave of absence for a maximum period of 180 consecutive days. To be consistent with this, students who recently withdrew from a program or who were granted a leave of absence may be considered as having lapsed enrollment as long as this occurs within the 180 consecutive days timeframe; however, students will be required to apply for readmission to the University after the 180 consecutive days timeframe.

The SACSCOC website provides updated policies regarding substantive change in relation to changes within the Department of Education. The *Office of Substantive Change* webpage (<https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/>) contains current information (SACSCOC, 2026b).

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees has approved additional substantive changes that require notification and, in some cases, approval prior to implementation. When the University is unsure whether a change is substantive in nature, the University will contact SACSCOC for clarification.

Procedures

Responsibilities of Trustees, President, Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, Program Directors, and Faculty:

Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, Program Directors, and Faculty have responsibility to be generally aware of the substantive change policy, and to inform the University's SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison at the earliest point possible of any proposal that may be considered a substantive change. Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, Program Directors, and Faculty also have responsibility to provide the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison with any data, information, or prospectus necessary to comply with SACSCOC policy, when requested. Faculty must approve substantive changes that originate in their Academic School/College prior to submission of the proposal to Academic Council.

Academic School/College Deans approve proposed substantive changes and bring successful proposals to the Academic Council for endorsement and later presentation to the full University faculty. Before bringing a new/revised program to Academic Council, Academic School/College Deans will work with Program Directors to determine the percentage of new content offered in the new/revised program by comparing objectives in the new/revised courses to objectives in previously offered courses at the same instructional level. School/College Deans must approve any substantive changes prior to submission to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Council.

Academic Council reviews proposed substantive changes and endorses successful proposals.

The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison recommends substantive changes to the President, after attending to the appropriate institutional

approval processes, including Academic Council review and review of financial resources by the Executive Vice President for Finance.

The LMU Board of Trustees reviews and approves substantive changes, on recommendation of the President.

SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison:

- Provides the Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, and Program Directors with information about the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. This includes, but is not limited to, providing information at meetings of the Academic Council, Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and University Strategic Planning.
- Works with other Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, and Program Directors to determine whether a proposed change is substantive.
- Determines what action is needed with respect to SACSCOC when a change is substantive in nature.
- Submits the appropriate notification or prospectus to SACSCOC.
- Coordinates with SACSCOC and the LMU Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, and Program Directors about any required follow-up action.

Notification of SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison of Proposed Changes

If a change is substantive, SACSCOC must be notified as much as 12 months in advance of implementing the change. Upon becoming aware of a proposed change that may be substantive, Vice Presidents, Academic School/College Deans, and Program Directors of the academic unit proposing the change should notify the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison. The appropriate Vice President and/or Academic School/College Dean will provide the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison with a copy of the proposed substantive change prior to the Academic Council meeting in which endorsement will be sought. The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will then determine if any proposal could be considered a substantive change.

Late Notification of SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison

If it is discovered that a substantive change has been implemented without notification of the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison, the appropriate Vice President, Academic School/College Dean, or Program Director has responsibility to notify the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison immediately. It is then the responsibility of the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison to notify SACSCOC as explained in the “Unreported Substantive Change” section of the *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*.

To ensure that proposals that may be considered substantive changes do not go unreported, Vice Presidents and Academic School/College Deans will perform an annual review of curricula, taking into consideration this substantive change policy.

Regular Review of the Policy and Procedures

A review of all anticipated academic initiatives will be conducted during the annual strategic planning process to monitor potential substantive changes. The policy and procedures will be reviewed during the annual strategic planning process and at the first meeting of the Academic Council each Fall semester (beginning Fall 2014).

References

Lincoln Memorial University (LMU). (2026a). *Heritage & mission*. <https://www.lmunet.edu/about-lmu/heritage-mission.php>

Lincoln Memorial University (LMU). (2026b). *Institutional goals*. <https://www.lmunet.edu/institutional-effectiveness/institutional-goals.php>

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2024). *Resource manual for the principles of accreditation: Foundations for quality enhancement*. <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2024/02/2024-POA-Resource-Manual.pdf>

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2026a). *Substantive change policy and procedures*. <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2026b). *Office of substantive change*. <https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/substantive-changes/>

Implementation Date:

First implemented: 03-05-2012

Revised: 04-08-2014; edited: 07-28-2014

Revised to new Standards: 04-03-2018

Revised to new webpage links: 08-27-2021

Revised: 06-20-2023 during University strategic planning process

Revised: 06-22-2024 after SACSCOC revisions to the *Substantive Change Policies and Procedures*

Revised: 02-06-2025 after SACSCOC revisions to the *Substantive Change Policies and Procedures*

Revised: 03-11-2025 during University strategic planning process

Revised: 02-06-2026 after SACSCOC revisions to the *Substantive Change Policies and Procedures*

Revised: 07-28-2026 after SACSCOC revisions to the *Substantive Change Policies and Procedures*

Published:

LMU Website (Academics: Institutional Effectiveness: Planning)

Posting on MyLMU (Internal Portal) Faculty/Staff Policy Manual (to begin Fall 2014)