



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

## **COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC ARRANGEMENTS: POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **- Policy -**

Collaborative academic arrangements are agreements between institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and accredited or non-accredited degree-granting institutions of higher education throughout the world for purposes of awarding academic credits and/or educational program completion credentials, e.g., certificates, diplomas, degrees or transcripts.

Institutions describe collaborative academic arrangements in many different ways, most commonly identifying them as dual or joint educational programs, affiliations, partnerships, consortial agreements, and other similar terms. Dual enrollments—high school students taking college courses for concurrent credit—are not included in this policy.

The most common forms of collaborative academic arrangements are dual educational programs and joint educational programs. For the purposes of accreditation and review by SACS Commission on Colleges, the following definitions apply:

- A dual educational program is one whereby students study at two or more institutions, and each institution awards a separate program completion credential bearing only its own name, seal and signature.
- A joint educational program is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and are awarded a single program completion credential bearing the names, seals and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

Institutions using alternative terms for either of the two educational programs/functions above are responsible for following the procedures that pertain.

Because the SACSCOC accreditation that has been awarded to a Member (accredited) institution is not transferrable to a Partner institution – either in actuality or appearance – SACSCOC reserves the right to prohibit the use of its accreditation to authenticate credit courses or programs offered with organizations not so accredited. Member institutions are responsible for ensuring the integrity of their accreditation and of their education programs when entering into collaborative academic arrangements.

In accordance with the SACSCOC policy on substantive change, Member institutions are responsible for notifying and providing SACSCOC with signed final copies of the agreements governing their collaborative academic arrangements. These agreements must address the requirements set forth in the collaborative academic arrangements policy and its procedures. For all such arrangements, SACSCOC-accredited institutions assume responsibility for (1) the integrity of the collaborative academic arrangements, (2) the quality of credits recorded on their transcripts, and (3) compliance with accreditation requirements. Those institutional responsibilities are outlined in the procedures below.

## Procedures

**Scope.** These procedures apply to collaborative academic arrangements as defined above.

### Ensuring the Integrity of the Collaborative Arrangements

In order to ensure the integrity of collaborative academic arrangements, agreements signed by Member institutions must address the following issues.

**Disclaimer Statement.** Member institutions entering into collaborative academic agreements with Partner institutions not accredited by SACSCOC are required to use the following “disclaimer statement” in their materials describing the relationship. The Member institution is also responsible for reviewing, approving and monitoring the Partner institution’s statements of relationship to ensure conformance with this disclaimer.

“[Name of Member institution(s)] is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools’ Commission on Colleges to award [state degree levels here] degrees. [Name of Partner institution] is not accredited by the Commission on Colleges and the accreditation of [name of Member institution] does not extend to or include [name of Partner institution] or its students. Although [name of Member institution] accepts certain course work in transfer toward a credential from [name of Partner institution], or collaborates in other ways for generation of course credits or program credentials, other colleges and universities may or may not accept this work in transfer, even if it appears on a transcript from [name of Member institution]. This decision is made by the institution subsequently considering the possibility of accepting such credits.”

**Institutional Names on an Academic Credential.** For undergraduate academic credentials, students taking courses from participating institutions in a collaborative arrangement may be awarded the academic credential from the SACSCOC-accredited institution when 25 percent or more credits were earned through that institution’s own direct instruction.

For graduate academic credentials, students taking courses from participating institutions in a collaborative arrangement may be awarded the academic credential from the SACSCOC-accredited institution where one-third or more of the credits were earned through that institution’s own direct instruction.

**Use of the SACSCOC Logo.** Neither Member nor Partner institutions may use the SACSCOC logo. Its use is reserved exclusively for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

### Ensuring the Quality of the Credits Recorded on Transcripts.

When evaluating, accepting, and transcribing credits awarded through collaborative academic arrangements, the Member institution must:

1. Examine courses transferred in or transcribed from Partner institutions to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Member institution and the requirements of *The Principles of Accreditation*. (See section “Applicable SACSCOC requirements” on page 4.)
2. Assess and monitor effectively courses and components completed through instruction by Partner institutions. This assessment and monitoring should be done by academically-qualified persons.
3. Record on the academic transcript the name of the institution from which a course is taken. If a Member institution desires to transcript as its own a course taken through a Partner institution, it must be able to demonstrate that the instruction was accomplished under the Member’s own supervision and included approval of the academic qualifications of each instructor in advance and the regular evaluation of the effectiveness of each instructor. The Member institution’s approach might include the joint appointment of instructors.
4. Disclose fully the nature of the collaboration on the transcript of the institutions awarding the credential.
5. Reflect accurately in its catalog the courses being offered through the collaboration if they are available to its own students as part of an educational program.

6. Ensure that qualified and competent faculty at each participating institution agree on the content and teaching methodologies of courses and educational programs and on the qualifications of the faculty members who teach in the programs. Qualifications of teaching faculty must comply with the faculty competence requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation*.
7. Ensure that the educational outcomes of a major or concentration offered as part of a collaborative arrangement are (1) comparable to the outcomes of the same major or concentration offered by the institutions in the collaborative arrangement or, if not offered by any of the participating institutions, (2) comparable to the outcomes of a peer institution external to the collaborative arrangement that offers the same educational program's major or concentration.
8. Ensure that, within the collaborative arrangement, there is appropriate faculty accountability to the institutions accepting the credit, perhaps through dual faculty appointments or other approaches that include evaluation by the accepting institution.

### **Ensuring Compliance with Accreditation Requirements**

The Member institution is responsible for ensuring that SACSCOC has timely access to the Partner institutions' materials, physical site(s) and personnel in conjunction with accreditation activities.

**Applicable SACSCOC requirements.** Accreditation standards (*The Principles of Accreditation*) and policies that affect the implementation of collaborative academic agreements are listed below. Because these standards apply whether the credit is transcribed by a Member institution or by a Partner, they should be considered when developing the collaborative academic arrangement documentation and, if necessary, the substantive change prospectus.

1. Integrity (Section 1)
2. Institutional Mission (CR 2.4)
3. Faculty (CR 2.8 and CS 3.7.1)
4. Learning Resources and Services (CR 2.9)
5. Institutional Effectiveness: educational programs, to include student learning outcomes (CS 3.3.1.1)
6. Academic program approval (CS 3.4.1)
7. Admission policies (CS 3.4.3)
8. Acceptance of academic credit (CS 3.4.4)
9. Practices for awarding credit (CS 3.4.6)
10. Consortial relationships/contractual agreements (CS 3.4.7)
11. Institutional credits for a degree (CS 3.5.2 and CS 3.6.3)
12. Student records (CS 3.9.2)
13. Physical facilities (CS 3.11.3)
14. Substantive change (CS 3.12.1)
15. Program curriculum (FR 4.2)
16. Publication of policies (FR 4.3)
17. Program length (FR 4.4)
18. Student complaints (FR 4.5)
19. Recruitment materials (FR 4.6)
20. Policy: Academic Collaborations
21. Policy: Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions
22. Policy: Distance and Correspondence Education (*if applicable*)

**Substantive Change for Dual Educational Programs.** Entering into a collaborative academic agreement that is a dual educational program is a substantive change that requires prior notification but not prior approval. A Member institution must meet the provisions of Comprehensive Standards 3.4.4 (Acceptance of academic credit) and 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements) of the *Principles of Accreditation* that expect it to assume responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript.

This collaborative arrangement does require that each participating institution properly notify the Commission and submit the required documentation prior to implementation. The required documentation consists of:

1. A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date, a description of the proposed collaborative arrangement, the complete address/location of the collaborative activity, and complete contact information for the lead person(s) at each participating institution
2. A copy of the final signed agreement prepared following notification.

**Substantive Change for Joint Educational Programs.** Because entering into collaborative academic agreements is a substantive change that requires notification and may require prior approval, Member institutions must meet the requirements of the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy for reporting and seeking approval of the change. The accreditation status of the Partner institution(s) determines the applicable substantive change reporting and approval responsibilities, which are described below. Category One agreements are those made with other SACSCOC-accredited institutions. Category Two agreements involve a Partner institution accredited by another accreditor that is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). Category Three agreements involve a Partner institution that is not accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor.

**Category One** (a COC-Member institution with Partner institutions that are all SACSCOC-accredited)

Although this collaborative arrangement does not normally require a prospectus or approval, it does require that each participating institution properly notify the Commission and submit the required documentation prior to implementation. In addition, instructional activities within the agreement may require separate notification and approval if they constitute significant departures from existing activities at the Member institutions. The required documentation for Category One arrangements consists of:

1. A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date, a description of the proposed collaborative agreement, the complete address/location of the collaborative activity, and complete contact information for the lead person(s) at each participating institution
2. A copy of the final signed agreement prepared following notification.

**Category Two** (a COC Member institution with at least one Partner institution that is accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor other than SACSCOC)

This collaborative arrangement requires the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) to properly notify the Commission, submit the required documentation, and secure approval prior to implementation. In addition, instructional activities within the agreement may require separate notification and approval if they constitute significant departures from existing activities at the Member institution(s). The required documentation for Category Two arrangements consists of:

1. A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date, a description of the proposed collaborative agreement, the complete address/location of the collaborative activity, and complete contact information for the lead person(s) at each participating institution
2. A copy of the final signed agreement prepared following notification.
3. Documentation that the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are not on a public sanction
4. Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)
5. Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
6. A plan to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets SACSCOC expectations
7. A plan produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the collaborative arrangement does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to Partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media.
8. Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) representing the collaborative relationship

**Category Three** (a COC Member institution with at least one Partner institution that is not accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor)

This type of collaborative arrangement requires the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) to properly notify the Commission, submit the required documentation, and secure approval prior to implementation. In addition, instructional activities within the agreement may require separate notification and approval if they constitute significant departures from existing activities at the Member institution(s). The required documentation for Category Three arrangements consists of:

1. A notification letter that includes a statement of intent, the anticipated beginning date, a description of the proposed collaborative agreement, the complete address/location of the collaborative activity, and complete contact information for the lead person(s) at each participating institution
2. A copy of the final signed agreement prepared following notification
3. A description of (1) any external governmental or accrediting agency approval of the institution(s) or program(s) involved in the collaboration, not to include that of the SACS Commission on Colleges, (2) the process of quality assurance used by the agency granting this approval, and (3) any required legal or licensing approvals
4. Documentation that the courses or programs of the non-SACSCOC Partner institution(s) are consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s)
5. Documentation that the institution meets the provisions of Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7 (Consortial relationships/contractual agreements), including the analysis of credits accepted in transfer
6. Documentation that faculty involved in the collaboration are qualified to teach assigned components or courses and a description of the means by which the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) will monitor these qualifications (Submit a completed COC Faculty Roster Form.)
7. Documentation describing the physical and learning resources that will support the collaboration
8. A plan to monitor and ensure that the quality of contributions made by the partner institution(s) meets applicable SACSCOC requirements
9. A plan produced by the SACSCOC-accredited institution(s) ensuring that the collaborative arrangement does not result in the appearance of extending SACSCOC accreditation to Partner institutions through promotional materials, academic publications, student transcripts, credentials verifying program completion, and releases to the news media.
10. Prototypes of official academic documents (e.g. student transcript, degree, diploma, certificate) representing the collaborative relationship

When necessary to ensure compliance with SACSCOC requirements, the Commission may request additional information concerning any of these collaborative academic arrangements.

**Document History**

*Approved: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, June 2010  
Revised: Executive Council, December 2010*