



ACCJC

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Substantive Change Manual

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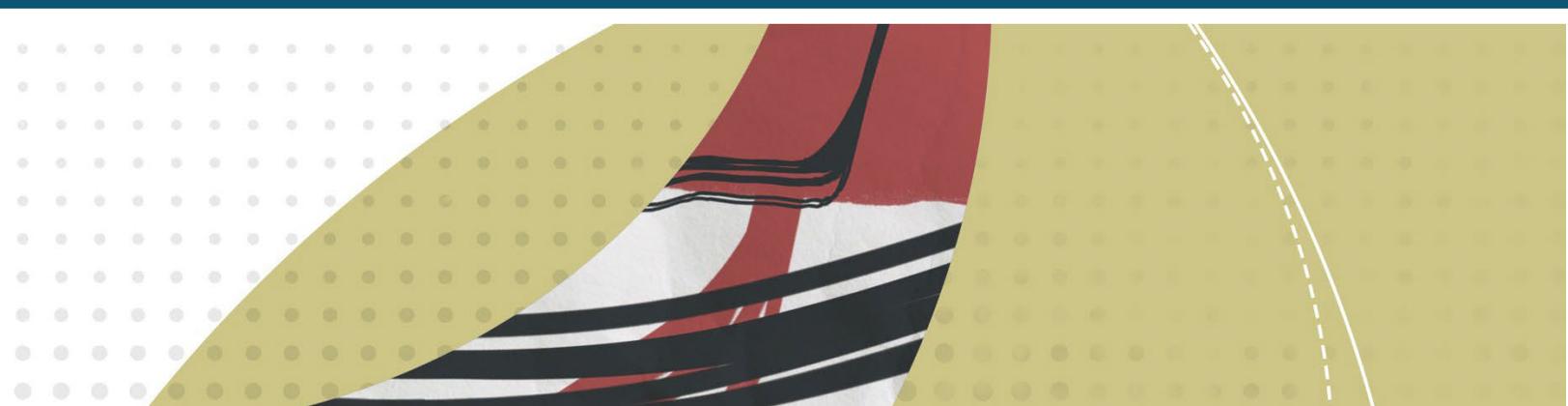


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Introduction

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) supports all efforts to continuously improve the quality of learning at our member institutions. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) regulations require that accrediting agencies have adequate policies and procedures to ensure that any substantive changes, as defined in the [Policy on Substantive Change](#) and in this manual below, do not adversely affect the capacity of the institution to continue to meet Accreditation Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. Federal law mandates that accrediting agencies require institutions to obtain accreditor approval of a substantive change before it is included in the scope of the accreditation granted to the institution (34 CFR § 602.22). The scope of an institution's accreditation covers all activities conducted in its name.

ACCJC, through its Substantive Change Committee and processes, ensures that institutions, through any substantive changes, continue to meet the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. The substantive change process requires evidence of institutional planning, resource commitment to the proposed change, and evidence that following the change, the institution continues to meet the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies.

It is the institution's responsibility to demonstrate the effect of a substantive change on the quality, integrity, capacity and effectiveness of the total institution. Substantive changes must be approved by the Substantive Change Committee prior to implementation (34 CFR § 602.22). The Committee will not approve a substantive change to be effective on a date prior to its action on the substantive change application. The approval date of a substantive change application will be the date of the action letter to the institution indicating approval by the Substantive Change Committee.

How to Inform ACCJC of Substantive Changes

To begin the process, the institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) must complete the [Substantive Change Inquiry Form](#). ACCJC staff will determine whether the proposed change qualifies as substantive, can be affirmed through administrative approval, or requires review and approval from the ACCJC Substantive Change Committee.

If the proposed change needs to go before the Substantive Change Committee, ACCJC will provide the ALO with a full, targeted, up-to-date application, and the college will be invoiced for the process, per the [ACCJC Fee Schedule](#). Applications and corresponding fees must be received at least 30 days before a meeting to be reviewed for approval. Upcoming meeting dates by semester are posted on ACCJC's [Substantive Change](#) page.

ALOs can contact the staff liaison assigned to their institution or email substantivechange@accjc.org with any questions or requests for further information. We are happy to assist you.

1 Definitions

The following definitions apply to all the places where these references are made throughout the manual.

Administrative Approval: Approval by ACCJC staff of a substantive change that does not need to go to the Substantive Change Committee for review and approval. Circumstances that allow for changes to be approved administratively are indicated, where appropriate, in the types of changes the Commission considers substantive. Changes that receive administrative approval are included in the scope of the accreditation granted to the institution.

50% or more of a program: Is determined by the total number of credit hours required for completion of a degree or certificate. For associate degrees this includes general education and any other institutional degree requirements.

Permanent Location: A location this is geographically apart from the main campus, and at which students can complete 50% or more of a program. This includes any purchased or leased locations for a term of five or more years. The lease can be either for the full term or renewable for the minimum period.

Branch Campus: Federal regulations define a branch campus as an additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. The Secretary considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if the location; 1) is 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.

Geographically apart: Considering the college's mission and geographical setting, including transportation and/or geological barriers, a location is geographically apart if it is not within the same reasonable contiguous geographic area of the main campus.

2 Changes the Commission Considers Substantive¹

2.1 Change in Mission, Objectives, Scope, or Name of the Institution

- Substantive change in the mission or objectives of the institution or its programs; if the mission or objectives of the institution becomes dramatically different, the Commission reserves the right to require the institution to complete the eligibility, candidacy, and initial accreditation process.
- Change in the degree level from that which has been previously offered by the institution, i.e., offering a degree at a level higher than the accredited institution offers currently.
- Change in the official name of the institution.
- Merger of two separately-accredited ACCJC institutions into a single institution.
- Reduction of programs to an extent that the institution's mission cannot be accomplished.

2.2 Change in the Nature of the Constituency Served

- Change in the intended student population.
- Closure of an institution or loss of state authorization or licensure for the institution or a program, withdrawal of or from accreditation if such withdrawal will result in closure²
- Closure of a location geographically apart from the main campus at which students can complete at least 50% of an educational program
- Courses or programs offered outside the geographic region currently served.

2.3 Change in the Location or Geographic Area Served

- Move of the institution to a new permanent location or the addition of a permanent location, or branch campus³, that is geographically apart from the main campus, and at which students can complete 50% or more of a program.
 - The substantive change application must list all the courses that are part of the program and indicate those that students are able to complete at new location.

¹ Please note that although some change at an institution may not warrant substantive change review, the institution should still take all necessary steps to ensure the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies related to that change are being met.

² See the [Policy on Closing an Institution](#) for further discussion of requirements related to closing an institution, as well as the [Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Agreements](#).

³ 34 CFR § 600.2

- The offering of courses and programs at a high school (dual enrollment) or a correctional institution do not constitute a change of location that requires substantive change approval, unless the college has ED approval to offer federal financial aid to these student populations.
- Considerations related to an additional or new location include the following:
 - The institution must demonstrate it has engaged in long-range planning for expansion,
 - Has integrated the location into its planning and evaluation processes,
 - Has clearly identified academic controls,
 - Has adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support services, and
 - Has the fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the additional location.
 - If required, a visit will be arranged within six months of review to an additional or new location the institution establishes. The purpose of the site visit is to verify that the location has the elements mentioned above as stated in the institution's substantive change application.
- Federal regulations define a branch campus as an additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. The Secretary considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if the location;
 - 1) is 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.
- New international locations at which 50% or more of at least one program will be offered require approval by the Substantive Change Committee. The first international location in each country requires a follow-up site visit six months to one year after implementation. Additional locations in a country may require a visit at the Substantive Change Committee's discretion (see [Policy On Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#))

and [Policy on Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals](#)).

- The Substantive Change Committee may not approve an institution's addition of locations after the institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change of control⁴ until the institution demonstrates that it meets the conditions for the Commission to pre-approve additional locations⁵.
- Closure of an institution or degree level program, loss of state authorization or licensure for the institution or a program, or withdrawal of accreditation if such withdrawal will result in closure.⁶
 - In addition to the substantive change application the college will also need to submit a teach out plan per the *Policy on Teach-out Plans and Agreements*.
- Closure of a permanent location geographically apart from the main campus at which students can complete at least 50% of an educational program.
 - In addition to the substantive change application the college will also need to submit a teach out plan per the *Policy on Teach-out Plans and Agreements*.
- Administrative approval may be given for the addition of a new location to institutions which have successfully completed at least one cycle of accreditation and have received approval for the addition of at least two additional locations. However, institutions must report the change to ACCJC via the Substantive Change Inquiry Form (<https://accjc.org/forms/substantive-change-inquiry-form/>) within 30 days if they have met criteria indicating sufficient capacity and control.

2.4 Change in the Control or Legal Status of the Institution

- Change in the form of control, legal status, or ownership of the institution.
- Merger with another institution.⁷
- Separation of one unit of the institution into separate institutions, dividing an institution into two or more separately controlled and accredited units, or a change of an off-campus site into a separate institution, or change of an accredited institution into an off-campus site or branch campus (withdrawal of accreditation).

⁴ As defined in 34 CFR § 600.3.1

⁵ 34 CFR § 600.22(a)(1)(ii)(I)

⁶ See the [Policy on Closing an Institution](#) for further discussion of requirements related to closing an institution and [Policy on Teach-out Plans and Agreements](#) for institutional or programmatic closures.

⁷ See also [Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#)

- Acquisition of any other institution or program or location of another institution, and/or the addition of a permanent location at the site of a teach-out the institution is conducting.

2.5 Change in Programs or their Mode of Delivery that Represents a Significant Departure from Current Practice

- Change in mode or location of courses when the change constitutes 50% or more of a program, degree or certificate. This includes the following:
 - 50% or more of a program offered at a new or different permanent location.
 - The substantive change application must list all the courses that are part of the program and indicate those that are being offered at the new or location.
 - 50% or more of a program offered through distance education or correspondence education.
 - The substantive change application must list all the courses that are part of the program and indicate those that are being offered through distance education or correspondence education.
 - Note: For associate degrees, general education credit hours and any other institutional degree requirements count as part of the 50% or more calculation.
 - Course additions that constitute 50% or more of a degree program.
 - The substantive change application must list all the courses that are part of the program and indicate which of the courses are new.
- Addition of programs that represent a significant departure from existing offerings of educational programs or modes of delivery from those offered when the institution was last evaluated. The following changes are considered significant departures for Substantive Change purposes:
 - New permanent locations (either owned or leased by the college on a long-term basis) that offer 50% or more of a program;
 - Distance education or correspondence education offered as a new modality (for the first time that an institution offers instruction for 50% or more of a program);
 - Certificate (16 units/credits or greater) or a Degree that requires additional significant institutional resource (Human resources, physical resources, technical resources) commitment.

- Certificates that are less than 16 units do not need to be reported to ACCJC for substantive change purposes.
 - Short-term programs, which qualify for the Direct Loan program only. This type of program must provide at least 300 but less than 600 clock hours of instruction offered during a minimum of 10 weeks of instruction.⁸
- Administrative approval may be for the following changes. However, institutions must report the change to ACCJC via the Substantive Change Inquiry Form (<https://accjc.org/forms/substantive-change-inquiry-form/>) to ensure that student access to federal financial aid is assured.
 - Use of a location for 50% or more of a program that is not considered a permanent location for the institution but rather is for occasional or incidental use (such as borrowed facilities, area schools, jails and prisons, etc.).
 - Dual credit programs at high schools or programs offered at correctional facilities.
 - Certificates integral to existing degrees (Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, or Associate Degrees for Transfer) or new Degrees where less than 50% of the courses are new to the institution.
 - Distance education or correspondence education programs, if the college has received approval on at least one distance education or correspondence education substantive change application.

2.6 Change in Credit Awarded

- Change in the way an institution measures student progress, including whether the institution measures progress in clock hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters, or uses time-based or non-time based methods.
- Substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded (more than 25% of total program credits hours or clock hours), or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for the successful completion of one or more programs.

2.7 Implementation of a Baccalaureate Degree Program⁹

- Addition of an instructional program that leads to the award of a baccalaureate degree.
- Addition of an area of emphasis within a baccalaureate degree program of study.

⁸ See 2019-2020 [FSA Handbook Volume II, section 2-23](#) for more information

⁹ See the [Policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees](#) for specific standards and policies that must be addressed, as well as additional specific evaluation criteria.

- Designation of a minor which can be awarded in association with a baccalaureate degree.
 - ACCJC has the authority, through its expansion of scope with ED to approve baccalaureate degrees at its member institutions. Approval by ACCJC is independent of any other regional or state agency requirements for baccalaureate degrees. It is the responsibility of the college to ensure it is meeting any other regional or state requirements.
 - The Substantive Change Committee does not approve baccalaureate degrees in concept. The college will need to include in the substantive change application a complete description of the program including the rationale for the program, evidence of sufficient demand, how the program is consistent with the college's mission, the planning process that led to the program, how it fits into existing college planning processes, complete program requirements including program SLOs, services that will support baccalaureate students, resources (personnel, physical, technology, and fiscal) that will support the program, and the leadership and governance structure that will ensure academic quality and institutional effectiveness are sustained.

2.8 Implementation of Direct Assessment¹⁰

- Change of an instructional program from clock hours or credit hours, to direct assessment of student learning. This includes programs using a hybrid approach.
 - The college will need to include in the substantive change application a complete description of the program including how the program is consistent with the college's mission, how assessment and validation of the quality/efficacy of the competency based education program will occur, how the program fits into existing integrated planning processes, the college's definition of credit or clock hour, the methodology that will be used to equate direct assessment to credit or clock hours, competencies of the program and how the institution will determine they are at the appropriate level and complexity congruent with the achievement expected at the relevant degree level for an institution of higher learning, how regular and substantive interaction between faculty and student will occur, how the institution will ensure faculty responsible for the competency based education program have the appropriate academic qualifications, the impact on resources, and the

¹⁰ See the [Policy on Competency Based Education](#)

leadership and governance structure that will ensure academic quality and institutional effectiveness are sustained.

- A program must obtain ED approval as a direct assessment program for the first program it is offered (including hybrid programs) to be eligible for Title IV funding. Subsequent programs from the same institution will not require ED approval for Title IV funding.¹¹

2.9 Contractual Relationship with a Non- Accredited Organization

- More than 25% of one or more of the accredited institution's for-credit educational programs are offered by the non-accredited organization.¹²
 - The substantive change application must list all the courses that are part of the program and indicate those that are being offered by the non-accredited organization.
 - Before submitting the substantive change application, colleges should review the [Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#)
 - In accordance with 34 § CFR 668.5(c)(3)(ii)(A) the institution's for-credit program is eligible for Title IV if the non-accredited institution or organization provides more than 25 percent but less than 50 percent of the educational program.¹³
 - The non-accredited organization may provide more than 25% but less than 50% of the program as long as (1) the accredited institution and non-accredited organization are not owned or controlled by the same individual, partnership, or corporation; and (2) ACCJC has determined and confirmed in writing for the accredited institution that the agreement meets its standards for contracting out education services.¹⁴
 - The accredited institution is responsible to perform all aid processing and disbursement for students attending the non-accredited institution or organization and is responsible for maintaining all records necessary to document student eligibility and receipt of aid.¹⁵
 - Institutions sometimes contract with providers of software platforms designed to support distance education programs. When such a contractor provides only the software or platform

¹¹ See 34 CFR § 668.10

¹² 34 CFR § 602.22(a)(1)(ii)(J). Also, see [Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#)

¹³ 34 CFR § 602.22(a)(1)(ii)(J).

¹⁴ See section on Contractual Arrangements in Federal Student Aid Handbook, Chapter 2, .Distance Education and Correspondence Education.

¹⁵ See section on Contractual Arrangements in Federal Student Aid Handbook, Chapter 2, .Distance Education and Correspondence Education.

for coursework and instruction in the program is still performed by the school's own faculty under the school's supervision, such an arrangement is not considered a written arrangement under 34 § CFR 668.5. However, if the contractor's staff provides instruction as part of its provision of software or other services, the school must have a contractual agreement in place that establishes the proportion of the program provided by the contractor and ensures it does not exceed the legal limits.¹⁶

2.10 Any Other Significant Change

- The Commission reserves the right to request reports and visits to assess the effects of any change it deems to be a significant departure from the previous reaffirmation of accreditation.

¹⁶ See section on Contractual Arrangements in Federal Student Aid Handbook, Chapter 2, .Distance Education and Correspondence Education.

3 Timing Considerations for Substantive Changes

Substantive change approval is needed before the change can be implemented to ensure affected students can qualify for federal financial aid. A substantive change application should be submitted when the institution is able to demonstrate and provide evidence that the change meets Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies and any specific evaluation criteria. **Substantive Change Applications are due to ACCJC 30 days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Substantive Change Committee.** Substantive Change Committee meeting dates are posted on the ACCJC website (<https://accjc.org/substantive-change/>).

In the following circumstances, institutions may not submit a substantive change application:

- During the period that an institution is on a sanction such as Warning, Probation, or Show Cause until the conditions that resulted in a sanction have been resolved and the Commission has reaffirmed accreditation. If the sanction includes a specific recommendation which cites as a non-compliance the institution's failure to seek substantive change approval of an existing program, delivery mode, or location, then, to the extent of that recommendation only, the institution may proceed with a substantive change application.
- If the institution is subject to withdrawal of accreditation, pending the outcome of administrative remedies.

4 Substantive Change Review Process

4.1 Step 1: Determining Whether a Change is Considered Substantive

The types of changes that are considered substantive and require review and approval prior to implementation are listed above. The institution's ALO is required to submit the Substantive Change Inquiry Form (<https://accjc.org/forms/substantive-change-inquiry-form/>) for each change, so that a determination can be made as to whether the change requires a full Substantive Change Application or whether an Administrative Approval can be granted.

4.2 Step 2: Develop the Application

- Once it has been determined that the proposed change requires approval of the Substantive Change Committee, the institution's ALO will be provide with the appropriate application, and the college will be invoiced for the process, per the [ACCJC Fee Schedule](#).
- The ALO is responsible for disseminating this information to the institutional representatives that will be involved in drafting the

application. The ALO is also responsible for reviewing the application for completeness and accuracy prior to submittal to ACCJC.

- Each question in the template must be addressed.
- Prior to submission, the ALO should ensure all relevant constituents are aware of the proposed change and have had the opportunity for review and input into the application, to ensure adherence to the institution's quality assurance processes. Faculty must be appropriately involved in developing and approving programs, especially those who will be responsible for instructional delivery and assessment of the program.

4.3 Step 3: Submit the Application and Fee

- Once the application has been completed, it should be submitted along with any accompany evidence and the fee. The application should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the meeting dates of the Substantive Change Committee as posted on the ACCJC website. Receipt of the Substantive Change Application and fee will reserve a place on the Substantive Change Committee's Agenda.

Preliminary Review by ACCJC Staff

Once an application has been submitted, ACCJC staff will review the application and give the institution the opportunity to provide missing information and to clarify any aspects of the application that are unclear. ACCJC Staff and the Substantive Change Committee reserve the right to defer any application that is incomplete. The preliminary review is designed to assist institutions in avoiding a denial or deferral of the application.

Review by the Substantive Change Committee

The Substantive Change Committee will review as many Substantive Change Applications as possible at a meeting. Applications that are unable to be reviewed will be scheduled for the next regular meeting of the Committee.

4.4 Step 4: Receive Notification of Action from ACCJC

The ACCJC Substantive Change Committee will take one of the following Actions:

1. Approve the substantive change¹⁷

The institution has demonstrated that it meets the evaluation criteria.

¹⁷ Approved substantive changes are included in the scope of the accreditation granted to the institution, and ACCJC notifies the U.S. Department of Education of all substantive changes it has approved.

2. Approve the substantive change and require a Follow-Up Report with or without a visit, or a visit without an institutional report

The institution meets the evaluation criteria, but the committee has specific questions (which don't require deferral), feels general verification is needed of sustained practice, or has questions concerning further implementation stages. A visit timeline will be specified: 6-18 months. The Substantive Change Committee will review any follow-up report(s).

3. Provisionally approve a planned substantive change that is subject to a federally mandated site visit

The institution's submitted plans for a change of ownership, new location, or creation of a branch campus demonstrate future actions that will meet the evaluation criteria. The provisional approval allows the institution to move forward with steps of implementation in preparation for seeking approval of the substantive change. The provisional approval may include a site visit. The provisional approval must state a date, not to exceed three years, by which the change must be approved for inclusion in the institution's accreditation. If that time is exceeded, then the substantive change request process must be initiated anew. A new location that requires a federally mandated site visit cannot be provisionally approved if there has been a change in ownership since the institution has successfully had three new locations approved by substantive change. The Committee may require additional reports or visits before the approval is final.

4. Defer pending additional information

Consideration of the request cannot move forward without receipt of additional information demonstrating the evaluation criteria are met.

5. Deny the substantive change

The institution has not demonstrated that the change meets the evaluation criteria.

6. Refer the proposed change to the Commission

The substantive change application can be referred by the Substantive Change Committee to the Commission when it has determined there may be the need for a comprehensive evaluation or for a special report and visit. The evaluation of the institution's substantive change follow-up report and/or visit may also be referred to the Commission when deemed appropriate for review by the full Commission. The Committee's referral to the Commission will include the reasons for such referral.

Appeal of the Committee Decision

If an application is not accepted, the institution may request that the Committee reconsider its decision. The request for reconsideration must be received by ACCJC within 30 days of the notice of denial.

Substantive Change Appeal Process

- If the institution wishes to appeal the decision of the Committee on Substantive Change, the appeal must be filed in writing and will be deliberated at the next meeting of the Commission.
- Members of the Committee on Substantive Change may participate in the discussion but will abstain from voting on the appeal.

4.5 Step 5: Site Visit Requirements for Substantive Change Approvals

Federal regulations require that certain substantive changes include a site visit as part of the approval. Generally, visits are required when there is a new location where at least 50% of a program is offered, when a new branch campus is established, or when there is a change of ownership that results in a change of control. Visits occur within six months of the start of operations.

- New permanent location where at least 50% of an educational program is offered. When there is a change that constitutes 50% or more of a program, certificate, or degree, at a new permanent location, a federally-mandated site visit is required. The purpose of the visit is to verify that the information provided by the institution in its substantive change application was accurate and complete. It is also used to verify that the actions implemented align with the plans that received provisional approval by the committee. A federally mandated site visit is required if the institution has:
 - Three or fewer additional locations;
 - Not demonstrated that it has a record of effective educational oversight of additional locations;
 - Been placed on warning, probation or show cause;
 - Rapid growth in the number of additional locations (more than 20%) within one year.
- A federally mandated site visit is not required for a new location if there are findings that the institution has met the conditions below and that the evidence demonstrates it has clearly identified academic control; regular evaluation of the locations; adequate faculty, facilities, resources and academic and student support systems; financial stability; and long-range planning for expansion. The conditions for an exemption from a federally mandated site visit include:

- The institution has successfully completed one cycle of accreditation (comprehensive review –midterm review – comprehensive review) and has achieved reaffirmation of accreditation; and
 - Has at least three additional locations that were previously approved by the accreditor; and
 - Has a demonstrated record of effective oversight of additional locations; and
 - The institution is not on sanction.
- Branch Campus. Substantive Change uses the federal regulation definition of a Branch Campus¹⁸. Federal regulations define a branch campus as a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of that institution. The branch location of an institution is independent if it is (1) is 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. An institution must provide a business plan in advance of establishing a branch campus (describing the educational programs, the projected revenues/ expenditures/cash flow, the operation, management and physical resources of the branch campus). Approval (accreditation) can only be given after determining the campus has sufficient educational, financial, operational, management, and physical resources. There must be a site visit as soon as possible after the campus is established¹⁹, in any case no longer than six months after.
 - Change of Ownership. Changes in the ownership of an institution which result in a change of control are subject to federally mandated site visits. The Substantive Change Committee can designate the effective date of its approval as being the date of the actual change, so long as the Committee decision is within 30 days of that change of ownership. There must be a site visit as soon as possible after the change takes effect, in no case later than six months after the change.

The Substantive Change Committee may also require a site visit if it deems that a visit would be appropriate. This could include, but not be limited to the following:

- If the institution is not due for a comprehensive evaluation within two years of the approval of the substantive change, an on-site evaluation or other review may be required by the Commission.
- If there has been rapid growth in the number of such locations.

¹⁸ 34 CFR § 600.2

¹⁹ The campus will be deemed to be established when classes are first offered after the criteria for independence are met.

Substantive Change team visits:

The Substantive Change Committee may require visits for approved changes where additional confirmation of conditions is desired. Site visits may be performed virtually (via video conference) at the discretion of ACCJC. Substantive Change visiting teams consist of peer academic and/or administrative evaluators. These visits may also include a member of the Commission staff. The size of the visiting team will be a function of the complexity and size of the site and/or proposed change. The visiting team will focus on the content of the original Substantive Change Application and any updated information requested by Commission staff prior to the visit, as well as any stated concerns of the Substantive Change Committee.

Note: The Commission requires institutions to absorb the costs of a site visit.

5 Circumstances that May Require Reports and Evaluation

5.1 Special Report and/or Visit

As a result of a Substantive Change application or review, circumstances may come to the attention of the Substantive Change Committee that may cause the Committee to recommend to the Commission that a special report is needed to be submitted by an institution. This report may be followed by a visit. These circumstances are:

- Information that reveals or indicates a significant departure from Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies;
- Evidence of unethical practices;
- Closure of a program or institution due to loss of state authorization or licensing;
- Lack of effective educational policies and practices; or
- Other circumstances or the accumulation of changes wherein the Commission concludes the institution, to which it granted accreditation, has effectively ceased to operate under the conditions upon which accreditation is granted.

These reports make it possible for the Commission to assess the impact of the change once it has been implemented. Requirements for these reports will be specified in the action letter approving the substantive change.

5.2 Comprehensive Institutional Evaluations

Major substantive changes may cause the Substantive Change Committee to decide that a comprehensive review is required.²⁰ Comprehensive reviews will include a visit by a peer review team and a Commission decision. Situations which may trigger this determination include:

- Change of ownership/control/legal status during the process of reaffirmation of accreditation or candidacy status;
- Complete or significant change in mission and/or a significant change of mission sought within two years of a change of ownership and change of control;
- Any relocation coupled with a change of mission;
- A change of classification from an off-site location to a stand-alone institution;
- Student indebtedness compared to program, job market, and salary;
- Poor student graduation rates, program quality, performance and/or program outcomes;
- Rapid growth in the number of sites where more than 50% of an educational program is offered;
- Any change that results in the transition to a primarily distance education institution; or
- Other circumstances or the accumulation of changes as determined by the Substantive Change Committee.

²⁰ 34 C.F.R. § 602.22(a)(h) Comprehensive evaluations triggered by a major substantive change will proceed in the same manner as a regularly scheduled comprehensive review, with an institutional self-evaluation report, peer review and peer review team report, and action by the Commission on the accredited status of the institution.

Appendices

Appendix A: Brief Descriptions of Selected Policies

There are Commission policies that are particularly relevant to substantive changes. The complete Policies are available on the ACCJC website.

- The ***Policy on Substantive Change*** provides the framework for this manual and all actions related to Substantive Change. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year*** outlines federal requirements and definitions regarding credit hour, clock hour, and academic year, and includes a clock-to-credit hour conversion formula. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Closing an Institution*** includes requirements of provisions for student completion of programs and transfer to other institutions, academic records, financial aid, faculty and staff, and completion of institutional financial obligations. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Agreements*** includes definitions of teach-out, teach-out plans, and teach-out agreements, and outlines when each would be required, and the process for the Commission's review. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Competency Based Education*** provides a definition of competency based education, federally recognized approaches to competency based education, Title IV requirements, and the Commission's responsibility for ensuring direct assessment programs are eligible for Title IV funds. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non- Accredited Organizations*** details the controls institutions must have in place when contracting with another entity to provide courses or programs. The policy provides guidance for contract content. Access the policy [here](#).
- In the ***Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education***, the Commission recognizes that most institutions will make use of the growing range of systems for delivery of instruction, including various electronic means. The policy is based on principles of good practice to help assure that distance learning is characterized by the same concerns for quality, integrity, and effectiveness that apply to more traditional modes of instruction. Access the policy [here](#).
- The ***Policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees*** provides guidance to colleges that wish to apply for authorization to offer a Baccalaureate Degree through the Substantive Change process. Access the policy [here](#).