

Policy Number: 8040

Policy Name: Substantive Change Policy

Responsible for Maintenance: Data and Compliance Officer

Effective Date: June 7, 2016

Last Updated: April 15, 2026

I. Policy Statement

Richard Bland College’s accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires that it report substantive changes in accordance with the Commission’s substantive change policy. Substantive change is defined by SACSCOC as “a significant modification or expansion in the nature and scope of an accredited institution.”

II. Reason for Policy

Richard Bland College requires this policy and accompanying procedures to remain in compliance with accreditation standards.

III. Applicability

The policy applies to all employees of the College who are in a position to institute applicable programs, degrees, credentials, procedures, or to propose or implement changes to same.

IV. Related Documents

SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy located on the SACSCOC website

V. Contacts

OFFICE	TITLE	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL
Institutional Effectiveness and Compliance	Data and Compliance Officer	(804) 862-6100 ext. 8612	afuller@rbc.edu

VI. Definition of Substantive Change

Richard Bland College’s accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires that it report substantive changes in accordance with the Commission’s substantive change policy. Substantive change is defined by SACSCOC as “a significant modification or expansion in the nature and scope of an accredited institution.” These modifications may include, but are not limited to the following:

- o a substantial change in the established mission or objectives of the institution
- o entering into a contract by which an entity not eligible for Title IV funding offers 25% or more of one or more of the accredited institution’s programs
- o initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreement or consortium
- o initiating off-campus sites
- o the establishment of a branch campus
- o the establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program

- initiating a certificate program at a new off-campus site or that is a significant departure from previously approved programs
- closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus or institution
- altering the length of a program significantly
- changing from clock hours to credit hours
- initiating degree completion programs

Questions about whether a proposed change/academic action represents substantive change may be directed to the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison. For further information about what constitutes substantive change, please see the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy located on the SACSCOC website.

VII. Responsibilities and Procedures

○ Responsibilities

An academic department or unit that is considering what may possibly be considered to be a substantive change or program modification must discuss the potential changes with the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison as soon as possible when the potential changes are being contemplated, as changes typically cannot be implemented prior to SACSCOC approval. Some examples of potential changes include:

- a. significant on-line program delivery;
- b. development of a new credential (i.e., degree programs, certificate program, etc.)
 - new credentials may or may not require a substantive change, depending on whether or not it represents a significant departure from current offerings
 - new credentials may also impact the status of off-campus sites, i.e. whether or not they exceed certain thresholds (25% or 50% of courses toward a credential).
- c. addition of one or more courses to the offerings at an existing or new off-site location; and
- d. items directly related to any of the requirements specified in Section VI of this policy and as laid out in the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy located on the SACSCOC website.

When adding one or more courses to the offerings at an existing or new off-site location, special attention must be paid in order to maintain compliance with the accreditation standards. Departments and units considering this type of change must follow the procedure as outlined in Procedure 4 of the *Procedures* section of this Policy.

Depending on the specific substantive change, notification to SACSCOC must be made between 3 and 9 months before the change is implemented. Many substantive changes will require the preparation of a comprehensive prospectus and prior approval from SACSCOC **before** implementation of the change may occur. In particular, should an implementation be desired for the beginning of a fall semester, it should be expected that the substantive change prospectus is submitted to SACSCOC prior to January 1 prior to the fall of the desired implementation.

The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is responsible for ensuring that all such proposed changes comply with SACSCOC regulations regarding substantive change, for reviewing proposed changes in a timely fashion, for assisting academic departments and other units in identifying the best way in which to meet the regulations, and for ensuring that the College's unit leaders, department chairs, and senior administrators) meet their responsibilities regarding substantive change.

In turn, the College's administrators and the leaders of the academic departments and other units should:

- a. be familiar with the basic tenets of substantive change;
- b. understand how their areas and decisions might impact accreditation; and
- c. keep the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison informed of any potential substantive changes on the horizon to maintain compliance with the Commission's Principles of Accreditation.

The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison is responsible for notifying the president and others as appropriate about any changes in the SACSCOC policy on substantive change and regularly reports on such changes to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee.

o **Procedures:**

1. The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will be notified by the appropriate personnel of potential substantive changes such as those listed above that are under consideration, well in advance of when such changes shall need to be implemented, by appropriate College personnel. The SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will determine if the proposed change is one that falls under the definition of Substantive Change
2. If the proposed change meets the definition of a substantive change according to SACSCOC policy, the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will determine, in consultation with the College's SACSCOC Vice President and the SACSCOC Substantive Change policy, whether the substantive change requires submission of a full prospectus or whether the Commission simply needs to be notified of the substantive change.
 - If a substantive change does not require a full prospectus, the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will notify the department or unit proposing the change and will assist with preparing a letter of notification for submission, following the appropriate SACSCOC procedure.
 - The department or unit will submit the letter of notification to the Accreditation Liaison for review, who will submit the letter of notification to the president for final review. The president will send the letter of notification to SACSCOC.
 - If a substantive change is of the type that does require a full prospectus, the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison will notify the department or unit proposing the change. That department or unit will complete the primary work in preparing the prospectus. The Accreditation Liaison is available to consult and assist during this process.
3. The prospectus will be submitted to the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison for review, who will forward it to the president for final review. The president will send the prospectus and other required materials to SACSCOC.
4. **For all proposed changes related to off-site locations,** including adding one or more courses to the offerings at an existing or new off-site (including dual enrollment) location, the Program Manager and the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison must be consulted as soon as a change request is received. Process Flow:
 - Request related to off-site offerings is received by Provost/Academics.
 - If off-site item is a new initiative that begins with RBC and is not initiated by the off-site location partner, the Program Manager and the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison should be included in the project discussion from the onset.

- Request presented to Program Manager as soon as possible
- Program Manager to evaluate SACSCOC Degree/Program limit impacts (25% or more; 50% or more thresholds)
 - Program Manager consults with SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison
 - Two-week turnaround time for decision
 - Program Manager reports to Provost/Academics on the impact of course addition