



Outcomes | Innovation | Improvement

# Substantive Change Manual

March 2024 Edition

[accjc.org](https://accjc.org)

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Notification and Approval Process for Substantive Changes .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 Types of Substantive Changes Notification and Approvals .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Types of Changes that do not Require Notification to ACCJC.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 Details and Application Requirements for Particular Substantive Changes.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Additional Locations.....	7
Branch Campus .....	8
International Locations .....	8
Closure of Location, Institution, or Program.....	8
Distance Education or Correspondence Education.....	9
Certificates (16 units/credits or greater) .....	9
Short-term programs that qualify for Direct Loan Program .....	9
Course Additions (25% or more of a degree).....	9
Baccalaureate Degrees.....	10
Implementation of Direct Assessment.....	10
Contractual Relationship with a Non- Accredited Organization .....	11
Other Significant Changes .....	12
<b>5 Application Submission Requirements and Institutional Responsibility.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6 Changes that Require Prior Approval from ACCJC before Implementation .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7 Substantive Change Committee Actions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Appeal of Committee Decision .....	15
<b>8 Site Visits and Special Reports.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Special Report and/or Visit .....	16
Comprehensive Evaluations .....	17
<b>Appendix A: Definitions .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix B: Relevant Policies and Brief Description.....</b>	<b>19</b>

## Introduction

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) supports all efforts of continuous improvement at our member institutions. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) regulations require that accrediting agencies have 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 institutions 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 retroactively. 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.

# 1 Notification and Approval Process for Substantive Changes

Start Here



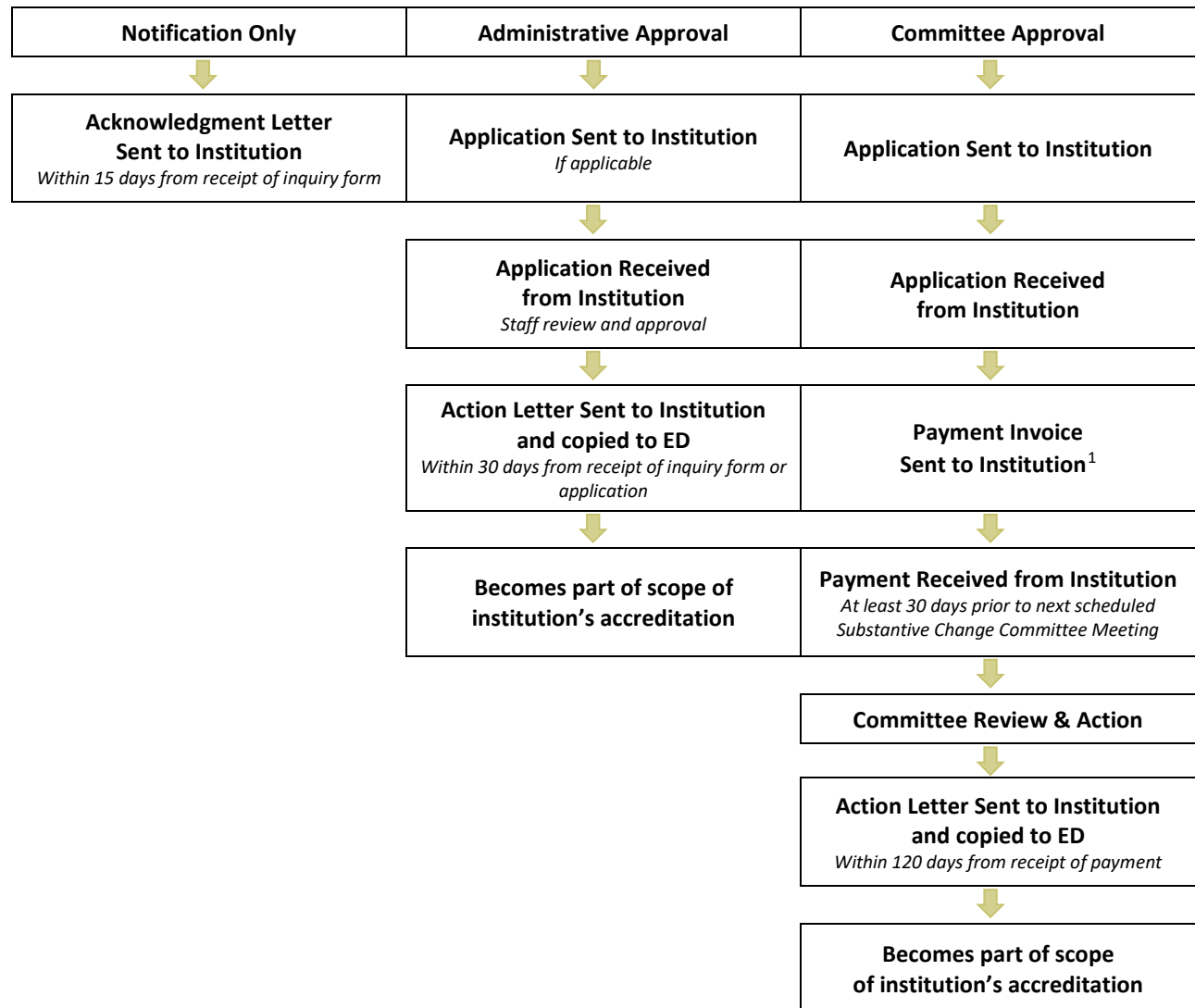
Submit Substantive Change Inquiry Form

	<p>The institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) submits the <a href="#">Substantive Change Inquiry Form</a> on the ACCJC website.</p>
--	--



Staff Review

ACCJC staff will determine whether change is notification only, can be approved administratively, or requires review and action from the ACCJC Substantive Change Committee



<sup>1</sup> Payment must be received by ACCJC 30 days before Substantive Change Committee review and action.

## 2 Types of Substantive Changes<sup>2</sup> Notification and Approvals

Institutions in good standing can notify ACCJC of substantive changes through the submission of the [Substantive Change Inquiry Form](#).

Circumstances where institutions require prior approval from ACCJC to implement certain substantive changes are noted in Section 6 of this manual.

The following table lists the various types of changes and indicates those that only require notification to ACCJC, those that can be approved administratively, and those that require committee approval.

**Notification:** These changes should be reported to ACCJC within 30 days of implementation. ACCJC will send the institution an acknowledgment letter within 15 days from receipt of notification.

**Administrative Approval:** The Commission has designated senior staff authority to administratively approve these changes. In cases where no application is required, an action letter indicating approval will be sent to the institution within 30 days from receipt of notification. For those requiring an application, one will be sent to the institution following receipt of notification. Upon receipt of the completed application, ACCJC senior staff will review and send an action letter of decision within 30 days from receipt of application. For circumstances that require greater staff capacity, ACCJC will make a final decision within 90 days of receipt of the completed application. No fee is required for administratively approved substantive changes. For applications staff determine require review and approval by the Substantive Change Committee, due to significant circumstances related to the substantive change, a decision and notification will occur within 180 days. In this circumstance, a payment invoice will be sent to the institution.

**Committee Approval:** These changes require Substantive Change Committee approval. Following receipt of notification, an application will be sent to the institution. Upon receipt of the completed application a payment invoice will be sent to the institution. Payment must be received within 2 weeks of the next scheduled Substantive Change Committee meeting for the application to be placed on the agenda. An action letter of the committee's decision will be sent to the institution immediately following the meeting. See ACCJC's website for Substantive Change Committee meeting dates: <https://accjc.org/substantive-change/>.

**Federal financial aid (Title IV funds):** the approval date of a substantive change will be the date of the action letter to the institution indicating approval.

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that although some changes at an institution may not warrant Substantive Change Committee review and approval, 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.

Type of Substantive Change	Notification	Administrative Approval	Committee Approval
<b>PROGRAMS, DEGREES, AND CERTIFICATES</b>			
New credit degree.	<b>X</b> <i>If has existing types of degrees and less than 50% of the courses are new to the institution</i>	<b>X</b>	
Distance Education – first course offered in distance education modality.		<b>X</b>	
50% or more of a degree offered through distance education or correspondence education*.  <i>* Prior approval before implementation is required if circumstances in Section 6 exist.</i>	<b>X</b> <i>If received approval to offer degrees in DE or CE modality</i>	<b>X</b> <i>Initial modality approval When at least 50 percent of students enrolled through DE When at least 50 percent of courses offered through DE</i>	
Addition of a baccalaureate degree.			<b>X</b>
Addition of an area of emphasis within a baccalaureate degree program of study.		<b>X</b>	
Designation of a minor which can be awarded in association with a baccalaureate degree.		<b>X</b>	
Course additions that constitute 25% or more of a degree*.  <i>* Prior approval before implementation is required if circumstances in Section 6 exist.</i>	<b>X</b> <i>If has similar types of degrees</i>		
Certificate (16 units/credits or greater) that requires significant institutional resources.		<b>X</b>	
Certificates (16 units/credits or greater) integral to existing degrees.	<b>X</b>		

<b>LOCATIONS</b>			
Addition of a permanent location (either owned or leased by the college on a long-term basis) geographically apart from main campus where students can complete 50% or more of a program (includes programs at correctional facilities approved by ED for students to receive federal financial aid).		<b>X</b> <i>If received approval for two additional locations<sup>3</sup></i>	<b>X</b> <i>First two additional locations</i>
Relocation of an existing additional location where students can complete 50% or more of a program.			

<sup>3</sup> 34 CFR § 600.22(c)

Type of Substantive Change <i>continued...</i>	Notification	Administrative Approval	Committee Approval
<b>LOCATIONS <i>continued...</i></b>			
Closure of a permanent location geographically apart from the main campus at which students can complete at least 50% of an educational program.		X <i>With teach-out plan</i>	
New international location at which 50% or more of at least one program will be offered.			X
Addition of a permanent location at the site of a teach-out another institution is conducting.			X
Move of the institution to a new permanent location.			X

<b>CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP</b>			
Contractual relationship with a non-accredited organization offering up to 25% of one or more of the accredited institution's for-credit educational programs*. <i>* Prior approval before implementation is required if circumstances in Section 6 exist.</i>	X <i>If not more than 25%</i>	X <i>If more than 25%</i>	

<b>CREDIT OR CLOCK HOURS</b>			
Change or development of an instructional program from clock hours or credit hours, to direct assessment of student learning (i.e. competency based education).			X
Change in the way an institution measures student progress (i.e. clock hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters).		X	
25% or more increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded*. <i>* Prior approval before implementation is required if circumstances in Section 6 exist.</i>	X <i>If less than 25%</i>	X	

<b>MISSION, NAME, LEGAL STATUS</b>			
Change in the mission or objectives of the institution or its programs.			X
Change in the intended student population.			X
Courses or programs offered outside the geographic region currently served.			X
Change in the official name of the institution.		X	
Change in control, legal status, or ownership of the institution.			X

Type of Substantive Change <i>continued...</i>	Notification	Administrative Approval	Committee Approval
<b>MERGER, SEPARATION, BRANCH CAMPUS</b>			
Merger with another institution <sup>4</sup> .			X
Merger of two separately-accredited ACCJC institutions into a single institution.			X
Separation of one unit of the institution into separate institutions.			X
Division of an institution into two or more separately controlled and accredited units.			X
Change of an accredited institution into an off-campus site or branch campus.			X
Change of an off-campus site into a separate institution or branch campus.			X
Addition of a branch campus geographically apart from main campus.			X
Acquisition of another institution's program or location.			X

<b>CLOSURE/DISCONTINUANCE</b>			
Discontinuance of a program		X <i>With teach-out plan</i>	
Reduction of programs to an extent that the institution's mission cannot be accomplished.			X <i>With teach-out plan</i>
Loss of state authorization or licensure for the institution.			X
Withdrawal of or from accreditation if such withdrawal will result in closure <sup>5</sup> .			X <i>With teach-out &amp; closure plans</i>
Closure of an institution <sup>6</sup> .			X <i>With teach-out &amp; closure plans</i>

<sup>4</sup> See also [Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#)

<sup>5</sup> 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](#).

<sup>6</sup> 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 Types of Changes that do not Require Notification to ACCJC

The following types of changes are not considered substantive and do not require notification through submission of the substantive change inquiry form:

- Courses and/or programs at a high school (dual enrollment), unless the college has U.S. Department of Education (ED) approval to offer federal financial aid to those student populations
- Course and/or programs offered at a correction facility that constitute less than 50% of a program and are not approved by ED for students to receive federal financial aid
- Courses at an offsite location that constitute less than 50% of a program
- Certificates that are fewer than 16 units and do not require significant resources from the institution
- Non-credit courses and/or programs.

### 4 Details and Application Requirements for Particular Substantive Changes

#### Additional Locations

Defined as a location that is geographically apart from the main campus, and at which students can complete 50% or more of a program. Substantive Change Committee approval is required for the first two additional locations.

Institutions that have successfully completed at least one cycle of accreditation and have received ACCJC approval for the addition of at least two additional locations, have not been placed on probation or equivalent status or been subject to a negative action by the agency over the prior three academic years, and that are not under a provisional certification, as provided in 34 CFR § 668.13, can receive administrative approval of subsequent additional locations. These locations must be reported to ACCJC within 30 days of establishment.<sup>7</sup>

#### Application Requirements

- list of all courses that are part of the program and clearly note those that students can complete at the additional location
- explanation of how the institution has engaged in long-range planning for expansion
- explanation of how the location has been integrated into the institution's planning and evaluation processes
- explanation of academic controls for the new location
- explanation of adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support services at the additional location
- explanation and documentation of the fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the additional location

---

<sup>7</sup> 34 CFR § 600.22(c)

The addition of locations after the institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change of control<sup>8</sup> cannot be approved until the institution demonstrates that it meets the conditions for the Commission approval of additional locations<sup>9</sup>.

### Branch Campus<sup>10</sup>

Defined as an additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location:

- is permanent in nature
- offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization
- 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.

### International Locations

Defined as being in a country outside the United States where 50% or more of at least one program will be offered.

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](#)).

### Closure of Location, Institution, or Program

Closure of a location (*at which students can complete at least 50% of an educational program*), an institution, 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.<sup>11</sup>

- 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](#).

---

<sup>8</sup> As defined in 34 CFR § 600.31

<sup>9</sup> 34 CFR § 600.22(a)(1)(ii)(I)

<sup>10</sup> 34 CFR § 600.2

<sup>11</sup> 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.

## Distance Education or Correspondence Education<sup>12</sup>

Substantive Change approval is required when an institution, that has previously had no course offerings in the distance education modality, offers a course in this modality for the first time. Thereafter, Substantive Change approval is required when 50% or more of a program is offered in either the distance education or correspondence education modality. After the initial approval of 50% or more of a program, the institution is required to notify ACCJC of any additional programs offered in these modalities within 30 days of implementation.

**Note:** 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.

See Section 6 for circumstances where prior approval for the implementation of additional programs after receiving initial approval is required.

Subsequent Substantive Change approval is required for distance education when either:

- the institution enrolls at least 50 percent of its students through distance education. For purposes of this calculation, a student is “enrolled in distance education” if the student enrolls in at least one course offered through distance education;<sup>13</sup> or
- the institution offers at least 50 percent of its courses through distance education.

### **Application requirements**

The substantive change application must list all of the courses that are part of the program and indicate those that are being offered through distance education or correspondence education.

## Certificates (16 units/credits or greater)

A new certificate that requires a commitment of significant additional institutional resources (human resources, physical resources, technical resources). Administrative approval is required. For certificates integral to existing degrees that do not require significant additional institutional resources, notification to ACCJC is required within 30 days of implementation.

## Short-term programs that qualify for Direct Loan Program<sup>14</sup>

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.

## Course Additions (25% or more of a degree)

Notification to ACCJC is required within 30 days of implementation.

See Section 6 for circumstances where prior approval is required before adding courses that constitute 25% or more of a degree.

---

<sup>12</sup> See the [Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education](#).

<sup>13</sup> 34 CFR § 600.22(a)(1)(ii)(C)

<sup>14</sup> See 2019-2020 [FSA Handbook Volume II, section 2-23](#) for more information

## Baccalaureate Degrees<sup>15</sup>

It is the responsibility of the college to ensure it is meeting any other regional or state requirements and provide documentation, if appropriate, of state/regional authorization within one year of ACCJC approval. Requires Substantive Change Committee approval.

### **Application requirements**

The Substantive Change Committee does not approve baccalaureate degrees in concept. Applications should include:

- a complete description of the program including rationale and need for the program,
- demonstration that the program is consistent with the college's mission,
- evidence of the planning process leading to the program,
- description of alignment with the existing college planning processes,
- documentation of complete program requirements including program SLOs and unit count
- description and documentation of support services for baccalaureate students,
- evidence of resources (personnel, physical, technology, and fiscal) that will support the program, and
- details of the leadership and governance structure ensuring academic quality and institutional effectiveness are sustained.

## Implementation of Direct Assessment<sup>16</sup>

Change or development of an instructional program from clock hours/credit hours to direct assessment of student learning, including programs using a hybrid approach. Requires Substantive Change Committee approval.

**Note:** Direct assessment is not the same as credit for prior learning. Credit for prior learning is college credit awarded to students for college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom setting (e.g., military training, job experience, national examinations). See the [Policy on Credit for Prior Learning](#) for additional details.

### **Application requirements**

The substantive change application should include:

- a complete description of the program including how the program is consistent with the college's mission;
- description of how assessment and validation of the quality/efficacy of the program will occur;
- demonstration that the program fits into existing integrated planning processes;
- description of the college's definition of credit or clock hour;

---

<sup>15</sup> See the [Policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees](#) for specific standards and policies that must be addressed, as well as additional specific evaluation criteria.

<sup>16</sup> See the [Policy on Competency Based Education](#)

- description of the methodology used to equate direct assessment to credit or clock hours, which should be congruent with norms of higher education (i.e., based on learning outcomes, rigor, estimated time for learning activities and assessments, milestones to demonstrate competency, etc.). The methodology should clearly articulate how the amount of learning in the direct assessment program is equivalent to the amount of instruction, student work, and demonstrated knowledge expected in a similar traditional program;
- the competencies of the program and how the institution determined these are at the appropriate level and complexity congruent with the achievement expected at the relevant degree level for an institution of higher learning;
- demonstration how regular and substantive interaction between faculty and student will occur;
- evidence describing how the institution will ensure faculty responsible for the program have the appropriate academic qualifications;
- documentation of the impact on institutional resources; and
- detail of the leadership and governance structure ensuring academic quality and institutional effectiveness are sustained.

The institution must also obtain United States Department of Education (ED) approval for its first direct assessment program it offers (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.<sup>17</sup>

### **Contractual Relationship with a Non- Accredited Organization<sup>18</sup>**

Administrative approval is required when more than 25% of one or more of the accredited institution's for-credit educational programs are offered by the non-accredited organization. For all others (less than 25%), notification is required to ACCJC within 30 days.

See Section 6 for circumstances where prior approval is required before establishing a contractual relationship.

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.<sup>19</sup>

- 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.<sup>20</sup>
- 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.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See 34 CFR § 668.10

<sup>18</sup> 34 CFR § 602.22(a)(1)(ii)(J). Also, see [Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Accredited Organizations](#)

<sup>19</sup> 34 CFR § 602.22(a)(1)(ii)(J).

<sup>20</sup> See section on Contractual Arrangements in Federal Student Aid Handbook, Chapter 2, Distance Education and Correspondence Education.

Institutions contracting with providers of software platforms designed to support distance education programs is not considered a written arrangement under 34 § CFR 668.5 when:

- such a contractor provides only the software or platform for coursework, and
- the instruction in the program is still performed by the school's own faculty under the school's supervision.

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.<sup>20</sup>

### Other Significant Changes

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.

## 5 Application Submission Requirements and Institutional Responsibility

Substantive change applications are not approved in concept or at planning phase. Applications should be submitted when the institution is able to demonstrate and provide evidence that the change does not impact the institution's ability to continue to meet Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies and any specific evaluation criteria.

**Substantive Change Applications and associated fees ([ACCJC Fee Schedule](#)) are due to ACCJC 30 days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Substantive Change Committee.** The Substantive Change Committee will not review applications and take action until ACCJC has received payment from the institution. Substantive Change Committee meeting dates are posted on the ACCJC website at (<https://accjc.org/substantive-change/>).

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.

Once the application has been completed, it should be submitted along with any accompanying evidence and the fee. ACCJC staff will review the application and give the institution the opportunity to provide any 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.

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.

## 6 Changes that Require Prior Approval from ACCJC before Implementation<sup>21</sup>

Institutions that have been placed on probation or show cause, have been subject to negative action by the Commission over the prior three academic years, or are under a provisional certification, as provided in 34 CFR § 668.13, must receive prior approval from ACCJC to pursue the following changes (all other institutions must report these changes to ACCJC within 30 days):

- A change in an existing degree's method of delivery.
- An aggregate change of 25 percent or more of the clock hours, credit hours, or content of a program since the institution's most recent accreditation review.
- The development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs to—
  - accommodate and recognize a student's existing knowledge, such as knowledge attained through employment or military service; and
  - close competency gaps between demonstrated prior knowledge or competency and the full requirements of a particular course or program.
- Entering into a written arrangement under 34 CFR § 668.5 under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV, HEA programs offers up to 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.

Institutions seeking prior approval should notify ACCJC of their intent to implement change through ACCJC's [Substantive Change Inquiry Form](#). ACCJC will notify the institution of the timeline for implementation of change within 15 days of receipt of the inquiry.

---

<sup>21</sup> 34 CFR § 600.22(b)

## 7 Substantive Change Committee Actions

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

Action	Requirements
<b>Approval</b>	The institution has demonstrated that it meets the evaluation criteria.
<b>Approval with follow-up report</b>	The institution meets the evaluation criteria, but the committee has specific questions (which do not require deferral), requires general verification of sustained practice, or has questions concerning further implementation stages. A visit timeline will be specified, generally within 6-18 months. The Substantive Change Committee will review any follow-up report(s).
<b>Provisional approval</b>	The institution's submitted plans for a change of ownership, additional 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. An additional 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 additional locations approved by substantive change. The Committee may require additional reports or visits before the approval is final.
<b>Defer approval pending additional information</b>	Consideration of the request cannot move forward without receipt of additional information demonstrating the evaluation criteria are met.
<b>Refer the proposed change to the Commission</b>	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 review 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.
<b>Deny the substantive change</b>	The institution has not demonstrated that the change meets the evaluation criteria.



## Appeal of Committee Decision

If the institution wishes to appeal the decision of the Substantive Change Committee, the appeal must be filed in writing and will be deliberated at the next meeting of the Commission.

Members of the Substantive Change Committee may participate in the discussion but will abstain from voting on the appeal.

## 8 Site Visits and Special Reports

Federal regulations require that certain substantive changes include a site visit within six months of the start of operations as part of the approval. Visits are required for:

- an additional location where at least 50% of a program is offered, unless the institution has had at least two previously approved additional locations;
- a new branch campus is established; and
- a change of ownership that results in a change of control.

The purpose of the visit is to verify that the information provided by the institution in its substantive change application was accurate and complete. The visit is also done to verify that the actions implemented align with the plans that received provisional approval by the committee.

Substantive Change site visit teams may either consist of Commission staff, or peer academic and/or administrative reviewers. The type of visit and size of the team will be based on the complexity and type of the proposed change. The visit 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. The institution will be responsible for the cost of visits that require a team.

A visit is not required for an additional location or branch campus if the institution has provided evidence demonstrating it has clearly identified academic control; regular evaluation of locations; adequate faculty, facilities, resources and academic and student support systems; financial stability; and long-range planning for expansion. Additionally, the institution must meet the conditions below:

- the institution has successfully completed one full cycle of accreditation (comprehensive peer review —midterm review —comprehensive peer review) and has achieved reaffirmation of accreditation; and
- has at least two additional locations that were previously approved by the accreditor; and
- has a demonstrated record of effective oversight of additional locations; and
- the institution has not been on sanction over the prior three academic years.

### Additional Locations

A visit must occur within six months after the location has been approved by the Substantive Change Committee. The visit will verify the additional location has the personnel, facilities, and resources the institution described in its substantive change application.

### **Branch Campus**

A visit must occur as soon as possible, but no longer than six months after the campus is established<sup>22</sup>. The visit will verify the branch campus is permanent in nature, offers courses in programs that lead to a degree or certificate, has its own faculty and administrative organization, and has its own budgetary and hiring authority, as described in the substantive change application.

### **Change of Ownership**

A visit must occur as soon as possible, but no longer than six months after the change takes effect. 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.

### **Other Site Visits**

The Substantive Change Committee may require a visit if it deems one necessary. This could include, but is not limited to the following:

- If the institution is not due for a comprehensive peer review within two years of the approval of the substantive change.
- If there has been rapid growth in the number of additional locations (3 or more within one year) where more than 50% of an educational program is offered.

### **Special Report and/or Visit**

As a result of a Substantive Change application or review, the Committee may recommend to the Commission that a special report is required by the 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.

The Commission will use these reports to assess the impact of the implemented change. Requirements for these reports will be specified in the action letter approving the substantive change.

---

<sup>22</sup> The campus will be deemed to be established when classes are first offered after the criteria for independence are met.

## Comprehensive Evaluations

The Substantive Change Committee may decide that a comprehensive peer review is required.<sup>23</sup> Comprehensive peer reviews will include a visit by a peer review team and a Commission decision. Comprehensive peer reviews are required for the following types of major changes:

- 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 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 an independent 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 additional locations (3 or more within one year) 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.

---

<sup>23</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 602.22(a)(h) Comprehensive peer reviews triggered by a major substantive change will proceed in the same manner as a regularly scheduled comprehensive peer 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.

## Appendix A: Definitions

<b>Administrative Approval</b>	Approval of a change by senior ACCJC staff. Changes that receive administrative approval are included in the institution's scope of accreditation, as of the date on the approval letter.
<b>Committee Approval</b>	Approval of a change by ACCJC's Substantive Change Committee. Changes approved by the committee are included in the institution's scope of accreditation, as of the date on the approval letter.
<b>50% or more of a program</b>	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.
<b>Additional Location</b>	A location that 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.
<b>Branch Campus</b>	An additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) is permanent in nature;</li> <li>(2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential;</li> <li>(3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and</li> <li>(4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.</li> </ul>
<b>Geographically apart</b>	A location is geographically apart if it is not within the same reasonable contiguous geographic area of the main campus. This determination takes into account the college mission, geographical setting, transportation, and/or geological barriers.
<b>Credit Hour/Clock Hour</b>	See ACCJC's <a href="#">Policy on Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year</a>
<b>Distance/Correspondence Education</b>	See ACCJC's <a href="#">Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education</a>
<b>Rapid growth</b>	Rapid growth is considered to be the implementation of three or more additional locations, within one year, where more than 50% of an educational program is offered.
<b>Teach-out plan</b>	See ACCJC's <a href="#">Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Agreements</a>

## Appendix B: Relevant Policies and Brief Description

The complete set of ACCJC policies is available on the ACCJC website. The following selection are Commission policies that are particularly relevant to substantive changes.

- The [\*Policy on Substantive Change\*](#) provides the framework for this manual and all actions related to Substantive Change.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.