Call for Comments – April 2020

PROPOSED CHANGES

Policy and Procedures for Branch Campuses and Additional Locations

Key to Changes: Delete, Add

Introduction

All branch campuses and additional locations are considered alternative academic patterns and are subject to the general provisions of the ABHE Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns, which should be consulted in addition to this policy. The Policy on Substantive Change should be consulted when initiating or relocating branch campuses and additional locations.

A branch campus is a geographically separate unit, independent of the main campus, with its own core facilities, curricula, faculty, administrative or supervisory personnel, and instructional resources. General oversight is provided by the parent institution. A branch campus (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers academic programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized credential; and (3) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

An additional location is a location remote from the main campus where students are expected to attend a regular session of a class on an ongoing basis and where students may complete 50% or more of coursework toward requirements for one or more of the institution’s educational programs. An additional location may qualify as a branch campus and be subject to requirements pertaining to branch campuses. Note that hybrid and streaming courses which have a required on-site class component are included in the percentage of courses offered at a given location. Institutions must carefully monitor the course offerings provided at a given off-
campus location to ensure that they are aware of any circumstances where the offerings may be approaching the 50% level.

**Procedures**

The establishment or relocation of a branch campus or additional location will be considered a substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. A change of physical location for an established branch campus or additional location is considered a relocation. An institution is required, prior to implementation, to submit for Commission on Accreditation (COA) approval a comprehensive written proposal addressing the location’s compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and the Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns, and appropriate documents should specify specifying organizational and administrative relationships between the branch campus or additional location and the parent institution, the institution’s fiscal and administrative capability to operate the location, regular evaluation of the location, and verification of the following:

a. Academic control is clearly identified by the institution.
b. The institution has adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems in place.
c. The institution is financially stable.
d. The institution had engaged in long-range planning for expansion.

The substantive change proposal must also include

a. A business plan outlining projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flow for the location.
b. A list of programs that will be offered at the location.
c. Evidence that the branch campus or additional location will meet all of the Standards for Accreditation that pertain to off-campus locations.

A site visit is required within six months of implementation of a new or relocated branch campus or additional location.

This procedure must be followed for all branch campuses; the procedure must be followed for all other additional locations unless a pre-approval waiver (see section below) has been granted.

Institutions operating a branch campus or additional location will be responsible to maintain evidence that the quality of education at the branch campus or additional location is maintained through:

a. Clearly identified academic control
b. Regular evaluation of the branch campus or additional location
c. Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems

d. Financial stability

e. Long-range planning for sustainability or expansion

Discontinuation of a branch campus or an additional location where 100% of a degree program may be earned is a substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change and requires submission of a teach-out plan for affected students and COA approval of the plan (see the Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements).

Pre-Approval Waivers for Additional Locations

The COA may, under certain conditions, waive an institution’s pre-approval requirements relative to establishing or relocating an additional location where the institution has previously hosted successful site visits to at least three additional locations. In general, such a waiver is granted on the basis of the COA’s review of evidence that the institution has established a system to assure quality across a distributed enterprise. To be eligible for such a waiver, the institution must have

a. completed at least one cycle of accreditation

b. received approval for three additional locations (the request for a waiver may be submitted with the request for a third additional location)

c. no instances of warning, probation, or show cause over the last three academic years

d. not been placed on provisional certification for Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) Programs as provided in 34 CFR 668.13 (see https://gov.ecfr.io)

Pre-approval waivers are not automatic, and the institution cannot initiate additional locations under a pre-approval waiver until a substantive change proposal seeking pre-approval waiver status has been submitted, and the COA has approved the request for pre-approval-waiver-status approved by the COA.

The substantive change proposal for a pre-approval waiver must evidence sufficient capacity to add additional locations without individual prior approvals and an adequate system to assure quality across a distributed enterprise, including the following:

a. Clearly identified academic control

b. Regular evaluation of the locations

c. Adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems

d. Financial stability
e. Long-range planning for expansion

Once a pre-approval waiver has been granted, the institution must submit, within 30 days of initiation or relocation of an additional location, evidence of the following for each additional location when subsequently locations are added under the pre-approval waiver:

a. Clearly identified academic control relative to additional locations
b. A system of data collection and regular evaluation to ensure comparability of educational quality at all additional locations
c. Written policies, criteria, and monitoring data to ensure Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems for all additional locations
d. Fiscal strength and Financial stability as reflected in the institution’s most recent Financial Responsibility Composite Score (FRCS) being 1.50 or higher
e. Comprehensive long-range planning for maintenance and expansion of additional locations

Notification must also include a list of programs that will be available at the new location.

Pre-approval waivers relative to additional locations will be reviewed by the COA at least every five years. At the time of the five-year review, site visits to a representative sample of not less than 25% of additional locations operated under the waiver will be required. Pre-approval waivers will be suspended in cases where an institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change in control, unless and until such time as the COA re-determines that the institution continues to meet the conditions for the pre-approval of additional locations. Pre-approval waivers will be suspended when an institution is on warning, probation, show cause order, or provisional certification for Title IV, HEA Programs. Pre-approval waivers do not apply where the institution acquires an institution, program, or location of another institution or adds a permanent location at a site where it is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that ceased operating before all students completed their program of study.

Preapproval waivers are not applicable to additional locations under the following circumstances:

a. a new degree program is offered
b. state/provincial boundaries are crossed
c. establishment of the additional location requires the development of substantial new faculty and learning resources
d. the ownership of the institution changes
e. the institution acquires an institution, program, or location of another institution
f. the institution adds a permanent location at a site where it is conducting a "teach-out" for students of another institution that ceased operating before all students completed their program of study.

Institutions that are not eligible for a pre-approval waiver or do not seek a pre-approval waiver (substantive change), must host a site visit within six months of establishment of any new additional location.

Institutions that have a pre-approval waiver and establish five or more additional locations in a single academic year (July-June) must host a site visit to a representative sample of 25% of these additional locations within six months of the establishment of the fifth additional location.

**Site Visits**

The purpose of a site visit for a branch campus or additional location is to ensure that the educational program(s) offered and credential(s) awarded at the site are: well designed and consonant with the institution’s mission and scope; properly authorized and validated by internal and external governing entities; adequately supported by financial, human, educational support, and facility resources; and adequately controlled and supervised by administrative oversight of the parent campus. verify that the additional location has the personnel, facilities, and resources the institution claimed it had in its substantive change proposal to the COA. The visit should also verify that the branch campus or additional location does not compromise the institution’s stability and resources.

Normally, ABHE visits to branch campuses or additional locations will be made by one representative of the COA staff who spends no more than one day at the site. For a site with limited offerings, the visit may last only two or three hours. Regardless of the length of the visit, the institution should prepare written answers to the following questions for the evaluator to review in preparation for the visit:

1. If the site is being reviewed because of a substantive change, to what extent are the facilities, resources (human, financial, physical, technological), and services consistent with the information in the approved Substantive Change Request? Discuss any changes since implementation from the plan described in the Substantive Change Request. If the review of this branch campus/additional location is part of a reaffirmation cycle rather than a new location, how have the facilities, resources, and services changed since the location was last reviewed?
2. Are there any courses or programs offered at the branch campus/additional location that are not available on the main campus? If yes, discuss how these are congruent with the mission of the institution.

3. What are the current financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the additional location? Have any of these changed since the approved Substantive Change Request or last review? Describe how these are adequate to support the current offerings at the branch campus/additional location.

4. Describe the current library and learning resources available to students taking courses at this location. How are these adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

5. Discuss and provide evidence that the additional location is adequately supervised by the main campus and that the additional location or branch campus has adequate administrative personnel.

6. Provide a complete faculty roster documenting the courses that were taught at the branch campus/additional location since its inception (or in the past three years, if a reaffirmation visit), the instructor teaching each course, and the documented expertise the faculty member has in the area of course content. Discuss and provide evidence that any faculty members qualified by means other than an academic credential have the appropriate expertise for the subjects they teach.

7. Describe the student services currently provided to students taking classes at this location.

8. Discuss and provide evidence that the additional location/branch campus is properly and currently authorized to operate in this location and offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through this location.

**The Report**

Following a site visit, the COA representative is expected to prepare a brief written report outlining his or her findings with respect to the above questions. The report will be shared with both the institution and the COA. Upon receipt of the report, the institution will have opportunity to issue a response outlining its concerns with or any needed corrections to the report.
Commission on Accreditation Review

At its regular meetings, the COA will review reports and related responses of visits made to additional locations or branch campuses by COA representatives. Following each meeting, institutions will be notified of any special COA concerns based on visit findings. The notification process will follow the same procedures employed for notifying an institution of any COA action. The site visit report, the institution’s response, and the record of any COA action taken relative to the report will become part of the institution’s permanent file.

Procedures for Branch Campus and Additional Location Visits During an Accreditation Cycle

ABHE will conduct site visits to all branch campuses and a representative sample of at least 25% of an institution’s additional locations during an accreditation cycle. Only visits completed during the 36 months preceding COA’s review of the institution for candidacy, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation may be considered in the representative sample. The following procedure will be applied to ensure a mechanism for implementation of this policy.

- When the Fall and Spring evaluation team schedules are prepared, COA staff will review institutions scheduled for candidacy, initial accreditation, and reaffirmation of accreditation visits and notify the COA Director of the additional locations operated by these institutions.

- The COA Director will identify a representative sample of at least 25% of each institution’s additional locations based on the number of locations and nature of programs offered and specify locations to be visited.

- Once a visiting team chair has been identified, the COA Director will confer with the chair to determine whether an evaluation team member or COA staff member should conduct the branch campus and additional location site visit(s).

- The COA Director will notify the institution of the required visit(s), location(s) to be visited, and assigned evaluator(s). The institution and evaluator(s) will schedule a mutually agreed date and time for the visit(s). The institution will be sent a copy of the COA’s questions for branch campus and additional location visits (above) by the COA Director.

- If the evaluation is conducted by an evaluation team member and prior to submission of the evaluation team report, the report on the branch campus/additional location may be folded into the evaluation team report; otherwise, a separate report will be prepared for COA review.