

Policy and Procedures for Branch Campuses and Additional Locations

Key to Changes: **Delete**, **Add**, **Explanation**

Proposed changes align with proposed changes in *Policy on Substantive Change and Glossary Definitions*.

Introduction

The Commission on Accreditation recognizes three types of off-campus locations for instructional delivery:

1. **Extension site/classes** – Off-campus site where students and faculty regularly meet in classes and where students may not complete 50% or more of course work toward requirements for one or more of the institution's ~~educational programs~~ **degrees, certificates, or diplomas** via face-to-face or hybrid courses.
2. **Additional location** – A facility that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution and at which the institution offers at least 50% of a ~~program~~ **degree, certificate, or diploma**. An additional location may qualify as a branch campus and be subject to requirements pertaining to branch campus.
3. **Branch campus** -- An additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus **and** (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.

All branch campuses and additional locations are considered alternative academic patterns and are subject to the general provisions of Standard 11d. 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. Establishment of an extension site/classes requires Commission notification only provided the institution is not currently or has not been on sanction in the past three academic years and/or is not under provisional certification for Title IV, HEA programs (see Policy on Substantive Change).

Note that hybrid and streaming courses ~~which~~ **that** 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 Procedures for Branch Campuses and Additional Locations and appropriate documents specifying:

1. Organizational and administrative relationships between the branch campus or additional location and the parent institution
2. The institution's fiscal and administrative capability to operate the location
3. Institutional processes for regular evaluation of the location,
4. A list of programs that will be offered at the location
5. Evidence that the branch campus or additional location will meet all Standards for Accreditation that pertain to off-campus locations
6. 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 expansion is the result of institutional planning.

In addition to the six items above, proposals for establishing or relocating a branch campus must include a business plan outlining projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flow for the branch campus.

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

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

Discontinuation of a branch campus or an additional location where 100% of a degree program may be earned 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. 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 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:

1. Clearly identified academic control
2. Regular evaluation of the locations
3. Adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems
4. Financial stability
5. 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:

- 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. Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems for all additional locations
- d. Demonstrated financial stability typically 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.

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 Verification Visits

The purpose of a site visit for a branch campus or additional location within 6 months of COA approval is to verify that the 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.

Additional Location

ABHE site verification visits to additional locations are conducted by a Commission Staff Representative (CSR) who spends a half-day at the site. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR at least one week prior to the visit.

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the additional location. Highlight changes in offerings since the approved Substantive Change Request.
2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the additional location.
3. Describe any changes in the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the additional location since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.
6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate at this location or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through this location since the approved Substantive Change Request.

7. Provide evidence that the additional location is adequately supervised by the main campus and has adequate administrative personnel.

Branch Campus

ABHE site verification visits to branch campuses are conducted by a Commission Staff Representative (CSR) who spends one day at the site. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR one week prior to the visit.

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the branch campus. Highlight changes in offerings since the approved Substantive Change Request.
2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the branch campus.
3. Describe any changes in the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered at the branch campus?
4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the branch campus since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.
6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate the branch campus at this location or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request.
7. Describe the administrative or supervisory organization of the branch campus and its relationship to the main campus. Discuss how this structure is appropriate to the size and scope of the branch campus and supports institutional goals.
8. Describe the hiring authority of the branch campus. Provide relevant examples.
9. Describe the budgetary authority of the branch campus. Provide a budget summary for the current year and documentation of the budget approval process.
10. Describe how financial outcomes to date compare with projections in the business plan submitted for the Substantive Change proposal.

Site Verification Visit Reports

Following a site verification visit, the COA representative is expected to prepare a 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.

COA Review of Site Verification Visit Reports

At its regular meetings, the COA will review reports and related responses of visits made to additional locations or branch campuses by Commission Staff 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 candidate status, 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 candidate status, initial accreditation, and reaffirmation of accreditation visits and notify the COA Executive Director of the additional locations operated by these institutions.
- The COA Executive 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 Executive 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 Executive 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 Executive 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.

For Additional Locations

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the additional location. Highlight changes in offerings since the last review.
2. Describe and document the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the additional location. Have any of these changed since the last review? Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the additional location.
3. Describe and document the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the additional location. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
4. Describe and document the student services provided at the additional location. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the additional location with courses taught for the past three years and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.
6. Discuss and provide evidence for authorization to operate at this location and to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through the additional location.
7. Discuss and provide evidence that the additional location is supervised by the main campus and has adequate administrative personnel.

For Branch Campuses
1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the branch campus. Highlight changes in offerings since the last review.
2. Describe and document the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the branch campus. Have any of these changed since the last review? Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the branch campus.
3. Describe and document the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the branch campus. How are these adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
4. Describe and document the student services provided at the branch campus. How are these adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?
5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the branch campus with courses taught for the past three years and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.
6. Discuss and provide evidence for authorization for the branch campus to operate at this location and to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through the branch campus.
7. Describe the administrative or supervisory organization of the branch campus and its relationship to the main campus. Discuss how this structure is appropriate to the size and scope of the branch campus and supports institutional goals.

8. Describe and document the hiring authority of the branch campus. Provide relevant examples.
9. Describe and document the budgetary authority of the branch campus. Provide a budget summary for the current year and documentation of the budget approval process.
10. Provide financial statements showing revenues, expenditures, and cash flows for the branch campus for the past three years and projections for the current year and the next two years.

Adopted February 2008; Revised April 2014, February 2015, November 2018, July 2020, February 2022, **PROPOSED January 2023**