Virginia Commonwealth University

Academic Affairs Handbook

Office of the Provost

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About the academic affairs handbook
The purpose of the academic affairs handbook is to provide operational transparency and facilitate collaboration between academic affairs and key internal stakeholders. Although faculty and administrators in academic departments, colleges and schools will be the primary users, all stakeholders within the university community are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the handbook.

Values
Values guiding this handbook include operational transparency, accountability, quality, excellence and equity for all stakeholders.

Effective version
The effective version of the handbook is the one posted to the Office of the Provost website and replaces prior versions. Although every effort is made to publish one handbook prior to the academic year, external (e.g., accreditation-related) or internal circumstances may require mid-year updates. The handbook posted to the Office of the Provost website should be considered current.

Themes
Content is organized by themes: Academic programs and organizational changes, bulletin, agreements and partnerships, quality enhancement and continuous improvement, and compliance and quality assurance. Chapters address distinct topics. Complex issues may require consulting multiple chapters. Notes directing the reader to other relevant chapters are provided where possible.

Contact
Each chapter in this handbook provides contact information for the appropriate senior vice provost for academic affairs team member. Please address chapter questions to those persons. A list of team members and areas of responsibility is located here.

General questions about this handbook may be directed to Andrew Arroyo, EdD, director for academic programs and policy (atarroyo@vcu.edu).
Glossary of terms

Bulletin(s): Published annually, contain information about university policies, course descriptions and academic requirements for the degree and certificate programs offered to VCU undergraduate, graduate and first professional students.

CAT: VCU’s software platform for publishing the Bulletins.

CIM (curriculum inventory management): VCU’s software platform for all course and curricular changes.

Closure: SACSCOC terminology for a permanent end to an academic program, resulting in no further admissions or degrees awarded after teach-out plan concludes. (See also Discontinuance.)

Discontinuance: SCHEV terminology for a permanent end to an academic program, resulting in no further admissions or degrees awarded after teach-out plan concludes. (See also Closure.)

Entry: Outside of the formal university admission process, an approved request to add and/or change a program of study (a degree program, concentration, certificate or undergraduate minor) made via change of major or special action form.

Fifth Year Interim Report: Conducted by SACSCOC, a monitoring review to ensure its institutions continue to meet accreditation standards between 10-year reaffirmation and compliance certifications. A accrediting agencies, such as SACSCOC, are required to monitor institutions having access to federal funds.

Initiating Unit: Academic unit advancing a proposal or request.

MOU (memorandum of understanding) or MOA (memorandum of agreement): Most often used as a non-binding “handshake” agreement with a non-VCU institution.

Permanent Suspension of Admission/Entry: The first step in the process for the closure/discontinuance of an academic program.

Policy: A policy may require or prohibit an action, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and/or mitigate risk.

Procedure: Mandatory actions to establish required actions and processes to comply with a policy, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and mitigate risk.

Program of Study: Can include degree program, certificate, concentration and/or undergraduate minor.

SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges): Regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions, such as VCU, in the Southern states.

SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia): The Commonwealth of Virginia’s coordinating body for higher education. Established by the Governor and General Assembly in 1956.

Significant Departure: Per SACSCOC, refers to a program that is not closely related to previously approved programs at the institution or site or for the mode of delivery in question. A subset of substantive change.

Substantive Change: Per SACSCOC, a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution.
Temporary Suspension of Admission/Entry: Temporary pause in new admissions or entries to an
academic program in order to address identified issues with a deliberate plan.

Teach-out Plan: A written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of
students in the event an institution, site or program closes. Requires SACSCOC approval before
implementation.

Ten Year Reaffirmation and Compliance Certification: Conducted by SACSCOC, a comprehensive
review of a member institution that takes place once every 10 years.
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS and ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES
Chapter 1 Academic program types and requirements

Academic programs: Structure and content

Educational Programs (a) embody a coherent course of study, (b) are compatible with the [institution’s] stated mission and goals, and (c) are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.

Degree requirements
Definition of a credit hour
A credit hour is defined as a reasonable approximation of one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time. Credit is based on at least an equivalent amount of work for other academic activities including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours and is established by individual programs. This definition represents the minimum standard. Student time commitment per credit hour may be higher in individual programs.

Credit hour amounts by degree level
VCU adheres to the credit hour requirements outlined in SACSCOC Standard 9.2 for its degree programs. The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. The institution provides an explanation of equivalencies when using units other than semester credit hours. The institution provides an appropriate justification for all degree programs and combined degree programs that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit.

Generally speaking, the following parameters apply to standalone degree programs at VCU. Specific credit hour requirements by degree are available on individual program web pages.

Baccalaureate degrees
An earned first baccalaureate degree requires at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level. Other baccalaureate degree requirements are located in the Undergraduate Bulletin and Major Maps.

Master’s degrees
An earned first master’s degree requires at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the graduate level. Other master’s degree requirements are located in the Graduate Bulletin.

Doctoral degrees or equivalent
Doctoral degrees or equivalent are generally earned after a master’s degree. Per SACSCOC (Core Requirement 9.2), “Higher degrees [than the first master’s degree] should contain progressively more hours” than the minimum 30 semester credit hours required for a first master’s degree. Exceptions require justification. Other degree requirements are located in the Graduate Bulletin.
**Professional degrees**

Professional degree requirements are located in the [Professional Bulletin](#).

**Certificates**

VCU’s certificate programs fall into these categories:

- **Baccalaureate certificate**: A program of study where all course work is at the bachelor level. The required number of courses varies, with a minimum of nine credit hours and a maximum of 18.

- **Post-baccalaureate certificate** (formerly, post-baccalaureate undergraduate certificate): A program of study designed to further undergraduate education that does not require enrollment in a graduate-level degree program. The required number of courses varies, and the required number of credit hours beyond the bachelor’s degree ranges from a minimum of nine credit hours to a maximum of 15. The majority of these required courses are at the graduate level, with a limited number at the upper-division baccalaureate level. A bachelor’s degree is required for admission.

- **Graduate certificate**: A program of graduate-level study in a particular subject area or area of specialization. The required number of credit hours ranges from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 24, with all course work at the graduate level. Again, a bachelor’s degree is required for admission.

- **Certificate of advanced graduate study** (formerly, post-master’s certificate): A program of study that serves as an intermediate between the master’s and doctoral level. Course work consists of advanced graduate study, and the required amount of credit hours varies by discipline. A master’s degree is required for admission.

- **Post-professional certificate**: A program of study requiring a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 24 credit hours of course work, all at the graduate level. A bachelor’s or master’s degree AND licensure or national certification in a professional field are required for admission. Note: This classification is new to VCU and presents future opportunities.

**Additional degree program options**

VCU offers dual degrees, joint degrees, second baccalaureate degrees and accelerated degrees. Some of these options may be earned concurrently or sequentially and operate in collaboration with other VCU academic units or non-VCU institutions (domestic or international). Detailed information on additional degree options is located in the Bulletin (links below) and throughout the [Agreements and Partnerships](#) section of this Handbook.

- [Undergraduate degree definitions](#)
- [Graduate degree definitions](#)

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, EdD, director for academic programs and policy ([atarroyo@vcu.edu](mailto:atarroyo@vcu.edu)), and Rachel Gable, EdD, director for institutional effectiveness ([rgable@vcu.edu](mailto:rgable@vcu.edu)).
Chapter 2 Development and modification of academic programs

The Office of the Provost provides support and guidance for developing and modifying academic programs and efficiently guiding them through VCU’s six-step development and approval process outlined below.

Reasons to develop or modify an academic program
Faculty develop academic programs for many reasons. Some of the most common reasons include:

- Desire to respond to societal (local, national and international) trends and advancements
- Requirements of employers for new or improved means of developing and/or training highly qualified/skilled professionals
- Need to enact changes required by specialized accrediting bodies
- Aspiration and foresight to become a leader in an emerging or not-yet-existing field or discipline
- Overall commitment to leadership, quality, effectiveness and continuous improvement in service to students and the academic enterprise

Program development review and approval process
The program development review and approval process reflects an internal shared governance environment and a responsibility to satisfy the requirements of external agencies. This process fosters transparency, accountability and equity for all affected stakeholders. All academic units seeking to create or modify an academic program should follow this process.

A timeline for this process is available on the provost’s website under program development and modification of academic programs.

Note: The first two steps below are critical for due diligence related to the viability of an idea, student and employer demand for a program and investment of limited institutional fiscal, physical and human resources. Consequently, it is not practicable that all ideas advance to step 3.

1. **Notification and preliminary discovery.** Initiating unit submits the [program development and modification/organizational change request form](#). Upon receipt, the SCHEV liaison responds to unit based on information provided.

2. **Pre-proposal development and review.** The initiating unit completes a pre-proposal form and pre-proposal authorization form to make an academic and business case for the proposed request, identifying resources needed and available to initiate and sustain the program. The SCHEV liaison provides guidance during this process. Pre-proposals are only required for requests to create new degree programs.

3. **Full proposal development and review.** The initiating unit completes a full SCHEV proposal and [VCU Substantive Change Checklist](#) for the purpose of identifying SACSCOC implications. The SCHEV liaison provides the initiator with relevant resources to facilitate this process. Prior to final submission to the SCHEV liaison, the initiating unit should secure two in-depth reviews as a best practice for quality. One reviewer should assess the proposal content based on knowledge of the field, and the second reviewer should provide stylistic and technical editing. After a clean review by the Office of the Provost, the SCHEV liaison requests a new program code.

4. **Institutional approval process.** The final (reviewed and revised) full proposal advances through the appropriate institutional review and approval process. This process follows a set timeline that
should inform the initiating unit’s expectations regarding duration. New program proposals follow this path:

a. University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee or Programs & Courses Committee and University Graduate Council
b. University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies
c. University Council
d. President’s Cabinet
e. Board of Visitors

5. **Proposal submission to SCHEV/SACSCOC.** Internally approved programs require the notification and/or approval of SCHEV and SACSCOC before implementation. The Office of the Provost facilitates the necessary notifications and approvals at this stage. Though this is the culminating step in the approval process, a positive outcome is not guaranteed.

6. **Implementation of SCHEV action.** SCHEV staff will send a written approval to the provost. The SCHEV liaison will send the written notification to the college/school dean and all relevant parties, which will include the date for program implementation. The SCHEV liaison will add the program to the SCHEV Degree Inventory to track student enrollment in the approved program. The program initiator will work with the editor to provide content for the new program page in the Bulletin.

If the new program constitutes a substantive change as per SACSCOC policy, then program approval must be obtained by SACSCOC as well prior to implementation. (In some instances, units may begin to recruit for new programs not yet approved by SACSCOC, but with only explicit clearance to do so from the VCU SCHEV liaison.

**Program modification review and approval process**

In addition to developing new programs, academic units may seek to modify an academic program. Examples include:

- Add a concentration
- Change a core curriculum standard
- Change a modality
- Change a program name/title
- Merge programs or create spin-off(s)
- Change credit hours
- Request a CIP code change, degree destination change or degree/name title change

Modifications vary in complexity, which can affect the duration of the review and approval process. The SCHEV liaison provides academic units guidance on modifications. Some modifications also may involve SACSCOC.

**Queue**

The current list of items in the Office of the Provost’s SCHEV queue is located on the academic program status tracker and dashboard web page, which is available to all faculty and staff on the [development and modification of academic programs](#) web page.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Veronica Shuford, director of program development and innovation (schevliaisons@vcu.edu).
Chapter 3 Temporary suspension of admission/entry

Temporary suspension of admission/entry is a deliberate action taken by an academic unit (see reasons outlined below). Temporary suspensions do not occur automatically or accidentally, nor are they an alternative route to closure. Any degree program, certificate, concentration or undergraduate minor must follow the regular curricular process in CIM to make the temporary suspension effective.

The typical maximum length of temporary suspension is one academic year. A temporary suspension is renewable only in exceptional circumstances per the process outlined later in this chapter. The degree program, certificate, concentration or undergraduate minor will remain displayed in the applicable VCU Bulletin and, in the case of a degree or certificate program, will be listed in the SCHEV Degree Inventory.

Implementation of temporary suspension prior to the conclusion of the review and approval process outlined in this Handbook places the university out of compliance with external agencies (e.g., SACSCOC; SCHEV). Moreover, unauthorized implementation exposes stakeholders, especially faculty and students, to inequitable outcomes. The Office of the Provost provides specific guidance related to implications of temporary suspensions for degree programs, certificates, concentrations and undergraduate minors respectively.

Reasons to temporarily suspend admission and entry
A college/school or department may wish to temporarily suspend admission or entry for one or more reasons including but not limited to:

- Program-wide curricular updates of a significant nature
- Lack of qualified faculty
- Fiscal evaluation
- Low or no enrollment in recent year(s)*
- Recommendation or requirement of a program-level accrediting body (e.g., in cases where program is no longer applicable for entry to the discipline)

*Enrollment notes: As a best practice, academic units will monitor enrollment activity and take note of downward trends. In most cases, total enrollment in a degree program should not reach zero before the academic unit takes action. Two consecutive semesters of low or no enrollment should trigger intervention at the college/school/department level. Potential interventions are: (1) enhance degree program visibility and recruiting efforts in the next enrollment cycle; (2) begin process to temporarily suspend the degree program for retooling; or (3) begin process to close or discontinue the degree program.

Review and approval process
Temporary suspension of admission/entry to any degree program, certificate, concentration or undergraduate minor follows a prescribed review and approval process to foster transparency, accountability and equity for all affected stakeholders. Decisions regarding temporary suspensions begin at the program and unit levels. Requests for temporary suspension are entered into CIM for university-level curriculum committee review. All academic units seeking to pursue a temporary suspension should follow this process. (Rare situations may warrant a different process and should be address with the Office of the Provost as soon as they arise.)
Renewal or extension
In exceptional circumstances where sufficient progress has not been made to address programmatic issues, the dean or dean’s designee may request a renewal of the temporary suspension. The dean or dean’s designee will make the extension request in writing to the Office of the Provost at the earliest possible date. Upon receipt, academic affairs will identify potential compliance issues with external agencies (e.g., SACSCOC; SCHEV). An accepted renewal must not place the institution out of compliance. Records of the renewal request and provost’s decision will be maintained in Records and Registration.

Note: Temporary suspensions of admission/entry to degree programs may have unintended consequences that should be fully explored. An example is potential effects on the five-year SCHEV program productivity figures, which are based, in part, on five-year average enrollments. A temporary suspension lasting a single year could result in a program being flagged for closure by SCHEV.

Workflow
Academic affairs coordinates the CIM workflow to ensure the suspended program properly enters temporary suspended status in university systems.

CONTACT
Please direct questions to Veronica Shuford, director of program development and innovation (schevliaisons@vcu.edu).
Chapter 4 Permanent suspension of admission/entry and closure/discontinuance

Chapter 3 covered temporary suspensions of admission/entry for degree programs, certificates, concentrations and undergraduate minors. The current chapter focuses on the steps to closure/discontinuance for degree programs and certificates only. Information regarding the process for closure/discontinuance of concentrations and undergraduate minors can be found on the Office of the Provost’s website.

Permanent suspension of admission/entry to a degree or certificate program leads to closure (SACSCOC terminology) or discontinuance (SCHEV terminology), and is a deliberate action. Closures occur neither automatically nor accidentally, and a closed program may not be reopened administratively. The closed program would have to follow the process for developing a new program before being permitted to reopen.

In CIM, a closure is a two-step process. It begins with a permanent suspension of admission/entry in CIM. After a teach-out plan is completed (i.e., the program contains no more active students), the unit requests closure in CIM.

Reasons to close/discontinue a program
The faculty of a college/school or department may wish to close a degree or certificate program for one or more reasons including but not limited to:

- Lack of student demand*
- Lack of adequate resources
- Lack of qualified faculty
- Faculty no longer support the program
- Program is outdated and can no longer meet employers’ needs
- Recommendation or requirement of a program-level accrediting body (e.g., in cases where program is no longer applicable for entry to the discipline)

*Enrollment notes: As indicated in chapter 3, as a best practice, academic units will monitor enrollment activity and take note of downward trends.

Review and approval process
Degree and certificate program (hereafter: program) closure/discontinuance follows a prescribed review and approval process to foster transparency, accountability and equity for all affected stakeholders. All academic units seeking to close a program should follow this process.

1. Preliminary steps (required to initiate permanent suspension):
   a. Consult SCHEV liaison
   b. College/school/department vetting, ensuring input is received from all affected stakeholders
   c. Request permanent suspension in CIM

2. Complete form for closure/discontinuance: Program development and modification request.
   Dean or dean’s designee submits form to SCHEV liaison. This step should be completed as soon as possible after step 1; units should not wait.
3. **Develop SCHEV notification of intent to discontinue the academic program and SACSCOC teach-out plan.** With guidance from the Office of the Provost staff, the college/school/department prepares a teach-out plan. The required SCHEV and SACSCOC documents constitute a complete program closure proposal for university-level review and approval.

4. **Institutional review and approval.** The program closure proposal advances through the institutional review and approval process in CIM.
   - a. University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee or Programs and Courses Committee and University Graduate Council
   - b. University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies
   - c. University Council
   - d. President’s Cabinet
   - e. Board of Visitors

5. **Reporting to SCHEV and SACSCOC.** Internally approved program closure proposals require the notification and/or approval of SCHEV and SACSCOC before implementation. The Office of the Provost facilitates the necessary notifications and approvals at this stage.

6. **Implementation.** If authorized, the closure will go into effect. The Office of the Provost will notify the academic units requesting degree program closure and the registrar when approval letters from both SCHEV and SACSCOC are received. At that time, the program may officially close and will be removed from the University Bulletin and the SCHEV Degree Inventory. For timely reporting, academic units should be aware that no degree program discontinuation will be effective prior to approval by both SCHEV and SACSCOC, and that both processes require a minimum of three to four months and sometimes up to six months for approval.

**Bulletin entry**

A modified program entry, which contains no curriculum information and states the program is under permanent suspension pending closure, will remain in the VCU Bulletin until VCU receives notification of the approval for closure from SCHEV and SACSCOC. The program listing will also remain in the SCHEV Degree Inventory until the closure process is complete.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Veronica Shuford, director of program development and innovation (schevliaisons@vcu.edu).
Chapter 5 Organizational changes

Some units within the university may seek to change organizational structure. Changes may be simple or complex, and include establishing or closing an academic unit, changing the name of an academic unit, reorganizing a college/school, establishing an off-campus site or any organizational change at or above departmental level.

Development and approval process

All academic units seeking an organizational change should follow this process.

1. **Complete form**: Program development and modification/organizational change request. The SCHEV liaison will follow up to provide guidance on next steps. (Note: A school seeking a change in designation to a college should consult this university policy first.)

2. **Institutional review and approval.** Internal approval of organizational changes is a four-step process.
   a. University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies
   b. University Council
   c. President’s Cabinet
   d. Board of Visitors

3. **Reporting to SCHEV and SACSCOC.** SCHEV staff must be notified in writing regarding any organizational change that involves the establishment, reorganization, or termination at or above the department level. SCHEV Council approval is required for any organizational change (establishment, reorganization or closure) that may alter the mission of the university, its curricular offerings or may not be implemented within currently authorized funds. Some organizational changes also may require notification and/or approval from SACSCOC. The Office of the Provost facilitates the necessary notifications and approvals at this stage.

4. **Implementation.** If authorized, organizational change will go into effect.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Veronica Shuford, director of program development and innovation (schevliaisons@vcu.edu), and Rachel Gable, EdD, director for institutional effectiveness (rgable@vcu.edu).
BULLETIN
Chapter 6 Bulletin

SACSCOC Standard 9.7 states:

The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate professional programs, as applicable. The requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.

The VCU Bulletin(s), published annually, contain information about university policies, course descriptions and academic requirements for the degree and certificate programs offered to VCU undergraduate, graduate and first-professional students.

Overview

The Bulletin for the academic year a student enters or re-enters a degree program identifies the curriculum degree requirements for that student. Students in continuous enrollment may fulfill the curriculum degree requirements of the Bulletin for the year they entered VCU or choose to be subject to the curriculum degree requirements articulated in a subsequent Bulletin. Subsequent bulletins can be chosen throughout a student’s academic career. In either case, students must fulfill all curriculum degree requirements listed in the Bulletin they choose.

A student’s effective Bulletin will remain in effect until the degree is awarded. Changes in academic program will not result in a change in effective Bulletin unless the student chooses to be subject to the curriculum degree requirements articulated in a subsequent Bulletin.

Students readmitted to the university will fall under the Bulletin in effect at the time of readmission. At the discretion of the college/school dean, department chair or program head, degree requirements may be waived and/or previously taken courses may be substituted for requirements in effect at the time of readmission. (Note: This policy may not apply to first-professional students.)

Schedule for Bulletin publication and CAT and CIM activity

The Bulletin reflects an academic year (fall through summer) and the website is launched during the spring semester (February or March) prior to registration for the upcoming fall semester.

CAT activity involves only noncurricular information, such as overview text for schools, departments and programs, administration changes, contact information and the like. Provisioned page authors initiate updates, which are moved to page approvers and on to the CAT editor in a three-step workflow process. These updates can be made at https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/ when the system is open – generally between March and December.

CIM (curriculum inventory management) activity covers all course and curricular changes, including edits to existing or new courses, programs and concentrations, program or course learning outcomes, suspended admissions, and closures. Workflow is determined by the requested action and can impact the time it takes for approval. Proposals submitted between February and November and approved at the highest level by the December deadline are included in the new Bulletin launch.

More information on key actions taken in CIM are located in relevant sections throughout this Handbook.

Both CAT and CIM activity follow a calendar year (January to December) schedule. The deadline for approvals for inclusion in the fall Bulletin is the last day before winter break in December. Proposals
must have been fully approved at the highest level before winter break to be included in the next published Bulletin. Both systems are closed during January for publication preparation.

The only updates considered between the spring launch and final archiving are for a high-level administrative change, such as a new dean, or an egregious error or to add new programs that have been approved to commence in the fall. These post-publication updates must be requested through and made by the Bulletin editor (bulletin@vcu.edu).

CONTACT

Please send questions to Teri Dunnivant, Bulletin managing editor (bulletin@vcu.edu).
Chapter 7 Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system

VCU uses CourseLeaf’s curriculum inventory management (CIM) system to manage critical processes, including to:

- Collect edits to course and program learning outcomes
- Collect edits to courses and programs, including new program proposals, program suspensions and closures
- Send proposals through workflow
- Feed approved content to the Bulletin

CIM workflow
This section provides an overview of the CIM workflow for courses and programs.

For courses
Workflow is the process that outlines the sequence of approvals for the proposal. The sequence of steps will vary based on the proposed action and the course’s organizational affiliation. Users may view the workflow for an existing course by selecting the course in CIM (https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/courseadmin/) and clicking on the preview workflow link.

In general, the path goes from the initiator to the editor, with some FYI notifications (notifications sent to units that may have an interest in knowing about the change being proposed, but who have no approval authority over the proposed change). Some of these notifications are relative to the ecosystem, which indicates where a course is used (and may need updating), and others are to administrative units, such as Student Accounting, Academic Advising, etc.

The proposal then returns to the affiliated unit for approval through their specified curriculum committee process, which may include steps for a program director, department committee and chair, school or college committee and chair, and dean. The library representative reviews and moves the proposal to the appropriate university-level curriculum committee (i.e., UUCC for undergraduate proposals and P&C for graduate proposals).

After university-level curriculum committee approval, the proposal goes to the registrar for entry or editing in Banner; the Bulletin editor makes any necessary changes or additions to the course description in Banner, after which there is a data sync between Banner and CIM.

For informational purposes only: The following workflow example displays only the role names in workflow sequence order. The actual workflow display will provide expanded information for the role participants such as email and eID.

Preview Workflow

Note: The actual workflow may vary based on data within the proposal itself, such as field selections, which fields have been modified, and other items. This workflow preview represents the workflow based on the current state of the proposal.

Proposal Key: 1

Workflow: standard

Examples of Administrative Units
• Editor_precheck
• SCHEV liaison_precheck FYI
• SACSCOC_precheck FYI
• Academic Advising – Undergraduate FYI
• Student Billing FYI

Example of affiliated unit
• ACCT Chair

Examples of ecosystem notifications
• FIRE Chair FYI All
• INNO Chair FYI All
• MASC Chair FYI All

Example of affiliated unit
• BU Committee Chair – Undergraduate
• BU Dean – Undergraduate

Examples of Administrative Units
• Library rep

Example of university curriculum committee
• University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee FYI All
• University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Chair

Examples of Administrative Units
• SCHEV liaison_postapproval FYI
• SACSCOC_postapproval FYI
• Student Billing Final FYI
• Registrar
• Bulletin Editor
• DegreeAudit_postapproval FYI
• Banner

Example of affiliated unit
• Initiator FYI

Important points to keep in mind
• Before submitting a proposal to workflow, consideration should be given to the workflow sequence and the time necessary to ensure that the proposal reaches the university curriculum committee (UUC or P&C) by the published meeting deadline.
• New course subjects or affiliation changes (due to reorganization) will require a code request made through the Miscellaneous form (https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/miscadmin/) before the proposal can be successfully submitted to workflow.
• New courses related to new programs, including certificates, will be assigned a stop in workflow where they will remain until the program receives the SCHEV approval letter. Please identify these courses in the rationale field of the course form. These new program and course proposals should be submitted at the same time.
• Changes to course credits will be assigned a stop in workflow if the ecosystem indicates the course is required within a curriculum and could change credits to degree in a curriculum. The course can continue in workflow once the curriculum totals for all impacted programs have been addressed and submitted into workflow.
For programs
Workflow is the process that outlines the sequence of approvals for the proposal. The sequence of steps will vary based on the proposed action and the program’s organizational affiliation. Users may view the workflow for an existing program by selecting the program in CIM (https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/programadmin/) and clicking on the preview workflow link.

In general, the path goes from the initiator to the editor, followed by some administrative steps: CIM OPS for code checks, the director of assessment and a precheck by the SCHEV liaison and the SACSCOC representative.

The proposal then returns to the affiliated unit for approval through their specified curriculum committee process, which may include steps for a program director, department committee and chair, school or college committee and chair, and dean. The director of assessment, the Degree Audit office and the library representative also review and move the proposal to the appropriate university-level curriculum committee (UUCC or P&C).

After university-level curriculum committee approval, the proposal returns to CIM OPS for a coding check and any required updates in Banner; Degree Audit reviews and makes any necessary updates in Degree Works, then the Bulletin editor does a final review and approves the proposal which will be imported into the Bulletin.

For informational purposes only: The following workflow example displays only the role names in workflow sequence order. The actual workflow display will provide expanded information for the role participants, such as email and eID.

**Preview Workflow**

*Note:* The actual workflow may vary based on data within the proposal itself, such as field selections, which fields have been modified, and other items. This workflow preview represents the workflow based on the current state of the proposal.

**Proposal Key:** 318

**Workflow:** standard

**Examples of Administrative Units**
- Editor_precheck
- CIM OPS
- Director of Assessment
- SCHEV liaison_precheck
- SACSCOC_precheck *FYI*

**Example of affiliated unit**
- ACCT Chair
- BU Committee Chair – Graduate
- BU Dean – Graduate

**Examples of Administrative Units**
- DegreeAudit_precheck
- Library rep

**Example of university curriculum committee**
- Programs and Courses Committee *FYI All*
Programs and Courses Committee – Chair
University Graduate Council FYI All
University Graduate Council Chair

Examples of Administrative Units
- SCHEV liaison_postapproval FYI
- SACSCOC_postapproval FYI
- CIM OPS
- DegreeAudit_postapproval
- Bulletin Editor

Example of affiliated unit
- Initiator FYI

Important points to keep in mind
- Before submitting a proposal to workflow, consideration should be given to the workflow sequence to ensure that the proposal reaches the university curriculum committee (UUCC or P&C) by the published meeting deadline.
- The SCHEV liaison (schevliaisons@vcu.edu) must be consulted prior to any new program activity in CIM, as well as any increase or decrease in the total credits required to complete a degree.
- Requests for suspension of admission/entry (temporary or permanent) should be made while there are students still in the program – not after all students have graduated – and should be accompanied by a teach-out plan. Requests for closure of the program would be made once all students have graduated.
- New programs, including certificates, will be assigned a stop in workflow where they will remain until the program receives the SCHEV approval letter. These new program and affiliated course proposals should be submitted at the same time.

Online Tutorials
Tutorials for CIM can be accessed on the Bulletin section of the provost’s web page.

CONTACT
Please send questions to Teri Dunnivant, Bulletin managing editor (bulletin@vcu.edu).
AGREEMENTS and PARTNERSHIPS
Chapter 8 Agreements between VCU units

Academic units at VCU form agreements with each other to leverage resources and expand educational opportunity for students. Academic affairs works closely with academic units to coordinate, review and maintain an inventory of all agreements.

Types of agreements
Agreements exist at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The major types of agreements are detailed here.

Note: Although versions of the following degree program agreements are available with non-VCU institutions, these descriptions address the format applicable to agreements between VCU academic units. Non-VCU institutional agreements are addressed in a subsequent chapter.

MOUs
In some cases, MOUs are non-binding “handshake” agreements. However, in the context of agreements between VCU academic units, an MOU may contain pertinent budget model information.

Undergraduate degree programs
Double major
A double major is the concurrent fulfillment of the requirements of two majors. To earn a degree with two majors, the student must complete the courses required in each major, any prerequisite courses required for both majors and the general education requirements, including the University Core curriculum, of the primary major. Individual degree programs may set limits on the number of credits that can be shared between two majors.

One diploma is awarded displaying the primary major and both majors appear on the student’s academic record. The primary major appears on the transcript as the degree awarded and the second major will appear as an accompanying note.

Dual degree programs
Dual degree programs allow students to pursue concurrent study in two separate undergraduate degree programs and receive two separate program completion credentials (diplomas).

To earn concurrent dual degrees by combining two VCU undergraduate programs, a student must fulfill all the requirements for both majors, the general education requirements of the primary degree program, including the University Core curriculum, and complete an additional 30 credit hours above the minimum degree hour requirement of the primary degree. A diploma is awarded for each degree, and both degrees will appear on the student’s academic record. Individual programs may set limits on the number of credits that can be shared between degree programs, up to a maximum of 20 percent.

Accelerated degree programs
Accelerated degree programs allow completion of a program of study in fewer than the usual number of years, most often by attending summer sessions and carrying extra courses during regular academic terms following a prescribed plan of study.

Other types of agreements are possible. The type and terms of an agreement are determined during the process for establishing new agreements.
Graduate degree programs

Joint degree programs
Joint degree programs consist of a single degree and curriculum that is delivered through a partnership between two or more VCU academic units.

Dual degree programs
Dual degree programs allow students to concurrently pursue study in two graduate or professional programs and receive two separate program completion credentials (diplomas). Students must meet all curricular requirements of both degrees and meet VCU’s residency requirement for the relevant degree program.

Approved dual degree programs that combine two VCU graduate or professional programs may share up to 20 percent of credits that apply to the requirements of both degrees. Individual programs may set more restrictive limits on the amount of credits that can be shared between degrees. To ensure integration of curriculum across the two degree programs, students must be admitted and enrolled in both programs for at least one semester prior to degree conferral. Some dual degree programs require concurrent admission and acceptance to both programs prior to beginning study.

Accelerated degree programs
Accelerated degree programs allow completion of a program of study in fewer than the usual number of years, most often by attending summer sessions and carrying extra courses during regular academic terms following a prescribed plan of study.

Process and protocols for establishing new agreements
Establishing new agreements between VCU academic units follows a set process with protocols to foster transparency, accountability and equity for all stakeholders. All VCU academic units seeking to create new agreements with other VCU academic units should follow this process.

1. Complete form: New Domestic Agreement Request – Between VCU Units.
2. Discovery meeting between academic affairs and unit leads. The purpose of this meeting is to review a series of questions to determine the terms of the agreement and next steps.
3. Academic affairs coordinates finalization. The terms of the agreement determine the duration of this step, which can vary from ~one month to one-to-two years. The finalization process can involve discussions, development, revisions and/or approvals including, but not limited to:
   - Curriculum
   - Bulletin
   - Enrollment and financial aid
   - Student tracking plan
   - Terms of review/renewal
   - Budget model implications
   - SCHEV
   - SACSCOC
   - University Counsel
   - Other
4. Signatures obtained. Academic affairs coordinates the signature process with the support of the VCU academic units. Copies are provided and an archive is maintained.
5. **Implementation and execution.** No agreement shall be executed or implemented until all required notifications and approvals are secured. Notifications and approvals may be internal or external (e.g., SACSCOC; SCHEV, as designated by policy).

Review, revision, renewal and termination
The review and revision process varies between types of agreements. A statement of review and revision is included in each approved agreement. The agreement review/renewal process should include a close re-examination of the curricula to ensure the renewed agreement reflects updates made since the original signing date.

Prior to terminating any agreement, Academic affairs will explore potential SCHEV and SACSCOC implications. These implications may include, for example, teach-out plans and teach-out agreements in accordance with SACSCOC substantive change policy.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, director for academic programs and policy ([atarroyo@vcu.edu](mailto:atarroyo@vcu.edu)).
Chapter 9 Agreements with non-VCU institutions

Academic units at VCU form agreements with other institutions to leverage resources and expand educational opportunity for students. Academic affairs works closely with academic units to coordinate, review and maintain an inventory of all agreements.

Types of agreements
Domestic agreements exist at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and take a variety of forms to accomplish their intended purposes. The major types of agreements are detailed here.

Note: Although versions of the following agreements are available between VCU academic units, these descriptions address the format applicable to agreements with non-VCU institutions.

MOUs or MOAs
MOUs or MOAs are non-binding “handshake” agreements.

Degree programs
Joint degree programs
Joint degree programs consist of a single degree and curriculum that is delivered through a partnership between VCU and one or more regionally accredited domestic institutions. Students receive a single diploma bearing the names, seals and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

Dual degree programs
Dual degree programs allow students to concurrently pursue study in two graduate programs, or a graduate and professional program, and receive two separate program completion credentials (diplomas). Students must meet all curricular requirements of both degrees and meet VCU’s residency requirement for the relevant degree program.

Approval process for executing agreements
Establishing new agreements with non-VCU institutions follows a set process with protocols to foster transparency, accountability and equity for all stakeholders. All VCU academic units seeking to create new agreements with non-VCU institutions should follow this process.

1. **Complete form:** New Domestic Agreement Request – With Non-VCU Institution.
2. **Discovery meeting between academic affairs and VCU initiating unit.** The purpose of this meeting is to review a series of questions to determine the terms of the agreement and next steps.
3. **Academic affairs coordinates finalization.** The terms of the agreement dictate the duration of this step, which can vary from ~one month to one-to-two years. The finalization process can involve discussions, development, revisions and/or approvals including, but not limited to:
   - Curriculum
   - Bulletin
   - Enrollment and financial aid
   - Student tracking plan
   - Terms of review/renewal
   - Budget model implications
   - SCHEV
   - SACSCOC
   - University Counsel
Other

4. Signatures obtained. Academic affairs coordinates the signature process with the support of the VCU academic units. Copies are provided and an archive is maintained.

5. Implementation and execution. No agreement shall be executed or implemented until all required notifications and approvals are secured. Notifications and approvals may be internal or external (e.g., SACSCOC; SCHEV, as designated by policy).

Review, revision, renewal and termination

The review and revision process varies between types of domestic agreements. A statement of review and revision is included in each approved agreement.

Example statement that may appear in an MOU:

This agreement shall be effective upon approval by both parties and shall remain in effect for an initial period of three years. This agreement may be renewed for set terms of one to three years thereafter upon written agreement of the parties. Either party may terminate this agreement upon written notice to the other party.

The agreement review/renewal process should include a close re-examination of the curricula to ensure the renewed agreement reflects updates made since the original signing date.

Prior to terminating any agreement, academic affairs will explore potential SCHEV and SACSCOC implications. These implications may include, for example, teach-out plans and teach-out agreements in accordance with SACSCOC substantive change policy.

CONTACT

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, director for academic programs and policy (atarroyo@vcu.edu).
Chapter 10 International agreements

The Global Education Office is VCU’s liaison for all international academic agreements.

Types of agreements
There are nine principal types of international agreements. Abbreviated definitions are provided below with approximate timelines for execution, and complete definitions with templates are posted on the GEO website.

- **MOU**: A non-binding “handshake” agreement between VCU and partner institution. (Process: ~one month.)

- **Student Exchange Agreement**: Agreement for reciprocal student exchange. (Process: ~one month.)

- **2+2 Undergraduate Transfer Agreement**: Agreement that expresses the current VCU process for accepting credits in transfer toward a specific VCU academic program. (Process: ~one month.)

- **Master's Enrollment Agreement**: Agreement to facilitate admission for international students to VCU master’s programs. (Process: ~two-to-three months.)

- **Contract**: Agreement of purchase or procurement with specific obligations for VCU and the partner. (Process: ~two-to-three months.)

- **Agreement for Faculty/Staff Exchanges**: Structures the involved commitments, roles, procedures and responsibilities for faculty/staff exchanges. (Process: ~two-to-three months.)

- **Short-Term Study Abroad Agreement**: Agreement that details activities associated with a VCU Study Abroad Program at a particular site. (Process: ~two-to-three months.)

- **Consortial Academic Agreement**: Agreement with another institution to award academic credit and/or education program completion (e.g., certificates, diplomas, degrees or transcripts). Examples include joint degrees and dual degrees. (Process: ~one-to-two years.)

- **Other/Customized Agreements**: GEO works in collaboration with initiating unit and relevant stakeholders to create customized agreement. (Process: varies.)

Approval process for executing agreements
GEO follows a four-step process for executing agreements designed to foster transparency, accountability and equity for all stakeholders. VCU units seeking to create international agreements must follow this process.

1. VCU initiating unit completes the International Collaboration Request Form.
2. GEO reviews form and facilitates discussions between relevant units for language/term negotiations.
3. GEO coordinates the finalization of an appropriate agreement.
4. GEO obtains final signatures, distributes and retains electronic/hard copies of fully signed agreement as appropriate.

GEO is available to advise initiating unit, including supplying examples of previously approved agreements for reference.

Inventory
Active and in-progress international partnership agreements are located on the GEO website.

Review, revision, renewal and termination
The review and revision process varies between types of international agreements. A statement of review and revision is included in each approved agreement.

An example statement is found in the MOU template:

\[
\text{This agreement shall be effective upon approval by both parties and shall remain in effect for an initial period of three years. This agreement may be renewed for set terms of one to three years thereafter upon written agreement of the parties. Either party may terminate this agreement upon written notice to the other party.}
\]

The agreement review/renewal process should include a close re-examination of the curricula to ensure the renewed agreement reflects updates made since the original signing date.

Prior to terminating any agreement, academic affairs will explore potential SCHEV and SACSCOC implications. These implications may include, for example, teach-out plans and teach-out agreements in accordance with SACSCOC substantive change policy.

CONTACT

Please direct questions to Jill Blondin, PhD, executive director, Global Education Office (jblondin@vcu.edu).
Chapter 11 Community college transfer and articulation agreements

Types of agreements
VCU has many transfer agreements with other institutions, particularly Virginia community colleges.

a. **Guaranteed Admission Agreements.** This type of agreement focuses on admission to VCU and stipulates the eligibility requirements whereby community college students are guaranteed admission to VCU and the benefits granted to students admitted through this agreement. In general, these agreements require completion of an associate degree, a minimum cumulative GPA and minimum grades of C in all courses applicable to the associate degree.

b. **Transfer Articulation Agreements.** This type of agreement focuses on the transfer of credit to specific degree programs at VCU from individual community colleges. The goal of these agreements is to establish 2+2 transfer pathways whereby students can complete the first two years of a bachelor’s degree at community college through an associate degree (including general education requirements).

c. **Guaranteed Transfer Partnership Agreement.** This is a new type of agreement which establishes partnerships with individual community colleges to develop four-year curricular pathways from associate degree programs to baccalaureate programs at VCU. These curricular pathways are similar to articulation agreements because they identify community college courses needed to fulfill the general education and introductory-level requirements for the major within a 2+2 model. The pathways also include information about the VCU degree requirements remaining for students at VCU after they transfer. Pathways, developed and approved by the community colleges and VCU academic departments, will be listed in the appendix of the agreement and updated on an annual basis (as curricula changes at either institution or new pathways are developed). Since these pathways are similar to articulation agreements, the goal is to eventually replace all articulation agreements with curricular pathways associated with the Guaranteed Transfer Partnership Agreements.

d. **Reverse Transfer Agreement.** This type of agreement establishes a process whereby students who transfer to VCU before completing an associate degree can request that credits earned at VCU be transferred back to community college to (hopefully) apply to associate degree requirements. Since more than 50 percent of community college students transfer before completing an associate degree, many community colleges are interested in this type of reverse transfer arrangement.

e. **Concurrent Enrollment Agreement.** This type of agreement establishes a process whereby students can register for upper-level, major specific VCU classes while still enrolled at community colleges.

Approvals process for executing agreements
Each type of agreement has a template for new agreements that has been approved by the University Counsel’s office. The chief transfer officer (associate vice provost for transfer initiatives and programs) for VCU, in collaboration with academic affairs, assists VCU units to draft transfer agreements, consult with the partner institution and shuttle agreements through the approval process. The approval process includes reviews by the academic department, dean’s office (usually an assistant or associate dean for undergraduate affairs), Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success, senior vice provost for academic affairs and provost before being reviewed and signed by the presidents of both institutions. A similar review takes place at the partner institution.
Inventory
Approved articulation agreements are posted on the Transfer Center website.

Review, revision, renewal and termination
In general, transfer and articulation agreement templates contain the following language:

*The terms of this articulation agreement shall be reviewed every three years. Either party to this agreement may withdraw from this agreement by providing written notice one year in advance of their intention to withdraw to the primary contact at the other institution.*

If updated, the revised agreement is amended as follows:

*This revised agreement updates and supersedes the previous agreement signed ____________.*

The agreement review/renewal process should include a close re-examination of the curricula to ensure the renewed agreement reflects updates made since the original signing date.

Prior to terminating any agreement, academic affairs will explore potential SCHEV and SACSCOC implications. These implications may include, for example, teach-out plans and teach-out agreements in accordance with SACSCOC substantive change policy.

CONTACT

Please direct questions to Seth Sykes, PhD, associate vice provost for transfer initiatives and programs (ssykes@vcu.edu).
QUALITY ENHANCEMENT and CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
Chapter 12 Assessment

Assessment plays a vital role in helping VCU provide a challenging and meaningful academic experience for every one of our students. Objective, honest and accurate assessments of our programs, instruction and student learning outcomes are critical to both our strategic planning and to our continuous improvement.

At its core, assessment is about seeking answers to difficult questions, such as: Are the students learning what we expect them to be learning? What isn't working so well, and why? What changes can we make to get VCU to the next level?

Assessment, when done correctly, benefits everyone — students, faculty, departments and the university. Better data means better decisions for our programs and, ultimately, our students.

At VCU, assessment findings and action plans submitted to the assessment management system, Taskstream AMS, inform continuous improvement practices and to provide accountability to internal and external stakeholders.

For continuous improvement
Faculty use assessment findings to document the strengths and gaps in student learning in terms of the expected learning outcomes. Also, they use the subsequent action plans to guide and document changes to curriculum, courses and/or pedagogy toward improving the learning outcomes.

For accountability
Accountability has several layers and facets. Annually, VCU audits assessment findings and action plans for compliance and integrity. These audits are performed via reporting tools in Taskstream AMS and they are conducted by VCU’s assessment staff. Departments and programs use evidence of ongoing assessment to prepare an academic program review and, related, evidence of current assessment is required when seeking a change to curriculum that will go before the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee or the University Graduate Council’s Committee on Programs and Courses.

Finally, the Office of the Provost and accredited degree programs use assessment findings and action plans to demonstrate to external stakeholders1 that the faculty standing behind VCU’s degree and certificate programs a) know what they want students to learn and learn how to do, b) know the degree to which students achieve these expected outcomes, and c) use the findings to make changes and modifications to curriculum, courses and/or pedagogy to address gaps and unacceptable shortcomings.

Annual assessment cycle
As indicated, degree and certificate programs annually enter findings for the expected learning outcomes, analyses of these findings and subsequent action plans for making changes to curriculum, courses or pedagogy. Assessment findings and action plans are to be submitted no later than the first Friday in October for the previous academic year.

Assessment Management System tutorials
Video tutorials for the Taskstream AMS are located on the assessment web page.

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1 External stakeholders include the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) and degree program accreditors in health and human services, education, engineering, business and others.
CONTACT

Please direct questions to Scott Oates, PhD, director of academic program integrity and assessment (sfoates@vcu.edu).
Chapter 13 Academic program review

At VCU, academic program review rests on the foundation of faculty leadership in a culture of shared governance. Core values of academic program review include excellence, transparency, collegiality, collaboration and shared responsibility for results. The importance of this foundation and these values is evident in each aspect of academic program review, beginning with the early conversations that take place during an orientation process and form the basis for trust going forward.

Definition and essential ingredient
Academic program review is the faculty-driven, holistic evaluation of a degree program’s quality and effectiveness, in support of continuous improvement for program excellence.

The most essential ingredient of a successful academic program review is the willingness and ability to learn and change—i.e., to transform.

Primary purpose
Academic program review is a forward-thinking endeavor. It provides a cyclical, structured opportunity for faculty to answer three questions, take two actions and achieve one primary outcome relative to their degree programs.

The three questions are:
1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to go?
3. How will we get there?

The two actions are:
1. Reflection
2. Planning

The one primary outcome is program excellence, as defined by the faculty in dialogue with administration and other key constituents. Using data to drive inquiry, analysis and direction forward, the academic unit gains a current snapshot, envisions the future and creates a roadmap to where it wants to be.

Role of faculty
At VCU, academic program review is:

- Faculty-driven, administration supported
- Action research
- An opportunity for rigorous, data-informed conversations
- Positive, visionary and transformative

As a faculty-driven process, academic program review preserves and reinforces the rights and responsibilities of academically qualified individuals to create and maintain a comprehensive, coherent and relevant plan of study for students. It is incumbent upon the faculty to include other key stakeholders in the academic program review process, when applicable. Other stakeholders may include adjunct faculty, staff, students, alumni, employers and other community members.
Unit of analysis and timing
The unit of analysis in academic program review is the degree program (undergraduate, graduate or first-professional). Typically, all degree programs in a degree-granting unit are reviewed together on an eight-year cycle. This approach of grouping programs by degree-granting unit creates efficiency and maximizes opportunities for strategic, holistic conversations. As a result, in addition to the degree program(s), the degree-granting unit also becomes a focal point of the review.

Exceptions to the above approach may be necessary. Under certain circumstances, as determined by the provost, senior vice president for health sciences (for health sciences programs) and deans, an academic program review may focus on an entire school or college, a subset of degree program(s) in a degree-granting unit or a single interdisciplinary degree program involving separate units. The timing of a review may deviate from the typical cycle due to unexpected challenges, leadership changes or the need to coordinate with an external accreditation.

Note regarding accredited programs: All degree programs at VCU go through academic program review as it is a university process. Specialized accreditation is for alignment with the professional field to which the program belongs, whereas academic program review is for the university. However, programs with specialized accreditations may go through a modified program review to avoid unnecessary duplication of accreditors’ requirements. Specific modifications are decided on a case-by-case basis through a conversation between the dean’s office and the Office of the Provost.

Phases
Academic program review occurs in phases (see Figure 1), which are detailed in the Academic Program Review Handbook.

Figure 1: Phases of Academic Program Review

![Phases of Academic Program Review](image)

During a typical cycle, the self-study is written in the fall semester, with the action plan being finalized in the spring semester after a peer review. VCU utilizes a hybrid peer review approach with internal and external reviewers.

The culmination of the program review process is implementation. Units conduct the self-study, undergo peer review and create the action plan during a single academic year, which creates momentum for continuous improvement efforts that begin in the subsequent academic year. Implementation is ongoing and continues to the next program review cycle.

Scope
Program review addresses multiple areas:

- Teaching and learning
- Research, scholarship and/or creative expression (to focus on work that has been peer-reviewed, critically reviewed or has received significant recognition due to impact at a local/national/international level)
• Service (to include contributions to R.E.A.L., community engagement, inclusive excellence, service-learning, patient care, other vital college/school and university priorities and outside/non-VCU professional service)
• Other subjects as determined by faculty and administration in dialogue

It is worth noting that academic program review supports and/or informs many other activities critical to the academic enterprise. These activities include (for example) program prioritization, resource allocation and budgeting, student learning outcomes assessment, strategic planning, degree program accreditation, and regional accreditation. Still, academic program review is a distinct activity with its own purpose and goals.

CONTACT

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, EdD, director for academic programs and policy (atarroyo@vcu.edu).
COMPLIANCE and QUALITY ASSURANCE
Chapter 14 Institutional accreditation

VCU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges\(^2\) to award certificate, baccalaureate, master’s and doctorate degrees. Institutional accreditation ensures that the university has a mission that is appropriate to higher education; has resources, programs and services sufficient to accomplish that mission; maintains clearly specified educational objectives consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers; and indicates whether it is successful at achieving its stated objectives.

Mandatory reports and cycles

Reaffirmation of institutional accreditation enables participating universities to reflect on the principles of practice associated with quality, equity and fairness in delivering on the promises of higher education to students, staff, faculty and the public. Member institutions participate in a reaffirmation process every 10 years. VCU completed a reaffirmation in 2014 and is scheduled for its next reaffirmation in 2024. The reaffirmation process includes the completion of a compliance certification document, which details the university’s compliance on a host of institution-wide standards, and a Quality Enhancement Plan, which engages the wider academic community in a focused, specific plan to cultivate institutional improvement in one or more areas with the purpose of enhancing student learning. The reaffirmation process includes both an off-site and an on-site review.

Member institutions prepare a fifth-year interim report during the reaffirmation cycle to maintain compliance with federal regulations. The fifth-year interim report includes an abridged compliance certification document and an impact report of the quality enhancement plan detailing summary findings from implementation, lessons learned and any alterations made to the QEP. Generally, the fifth-year interim report is reviewed off-site by a SACSCOC-appointed team, although a site visit may be conducted.

Substantive change

In addition to the 10-year reaffirmation and fifth-year interim report, member institutions are also expected to monitor and ensure continued compliance with federal regulations. SACSCOC has outlined a number of institutional practices, dubbed “substantive changes,” that require institutions to notify, and in some cases request approval from, SACSCOC before implementation. Substantive change is defined as a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Under federal regulations, substantive change includes:

- Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution
- Any change in legal status, form of control or ownership of the institution
- The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, either in content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated
- The addition of courses or programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution’s current accreditation or reaffirmation

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\(^2\) SACSCOC is the regional accrediting body for degree-granting higher education institutions in 11 southern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. SACS, founded in 1895, is a private, voluntary, nonprofit organization dedicated to the enhancement of educational quality and improvement of institutional effectiveness through peer review and institutional self-regulation.
• A change from clock hours to credit hours
• A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program
• The establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program
• The establishment of a branch campus
• Closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus or institution
• Entering into a collaborative academic arrangement that includes only the initiation of a dual or joint academic program with another institution
• Acquiring another institution or a program or location of another institution
• Adding a permanent location at a site where the institution is conducting a teach-out program for a closed institution
• Entering into a contract by which an entity not eligible for Title IV funding offers 25 percent or more of one or more of the accredited institution’s programs

Academic and non-academic units intending to embark on a substantive change, including changes requiring SCHEV approval, must follow the university’s Substantive Change for Regional Accreditation policy to ensure compliance with SACSCOC. Following this policy will ensure that the institution maintains compliance with federal regulations and fulfills its obligations to report substantive change to SACSCOC. Compliance with one agency does not constitute compliance with the other.

CONTACT

Please direct SACSCOC questions to Deborah Noble-Triplett, PhD, SACSCOC accreditation liaison and senior vice provost for academic affairs (nobletriplett@vcu.edu).

SACSCOC should only be contacted directly concerning an institution’s significant non-compliance with a requirement or standard.

Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097
(404) 679-4500
Chapter 15 Program accreditation

Many academic units across the university participate in specialized, or program, accreditation at the program level. Program accreditation affirms that the content and quality of an educational program meets industry or professional standards, and that its graduates are equipped with industry-defined skills and knowledge to enter the profession. Specialized accreditation extends to specific programs, while institutional accreditation addresses the entire university. Just as no single department is accredited by our institutional accreditor, the university as a whole is not accredited by a specialized or program accreditor.

If an academic unit participates in program accreditation, it will follow the program accreditor’s specific regulations and policies to maintain program accreditation. The Office of the Provost does not actively participate in academic units’ program accreditation. However, the Office of the Provost is dedicated to supporting the successful reaffirmation of program accreditation among its participating units, and has developed guidelines for briefing the provost in preparation for site visits as part of this process. Please follow the procedure below.

Briefing procedure

The following guidelines ensure that the staff in the Office of the Provost and, for health sciences programs, the Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences, are able to provide necessary guidance and oversight for degree programs seeking accreditation from national organizations. In preparation for submission of the program accreditation self-study report and on-site campus visit, academic programs must complete to following steps by the designated time.

Timeline:

Four weeks prior to submission of self-study to accrediting body

Submit a complete draft copy of the self-study report to the provost, and for health sciences programs send an additional copy to the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences. If not already included as part of self-study report, append an executive summary of the self-study report for review. Include the self-study report submission deadline in the executive summary.

Upon on-time submission of self-study report to accrediting body

Send a final copy of the complete self-study report to the provost and, for health sciences programs, an additional copy to the SVPHS.

Two-to-three weeks prior to site visit

Self-study director, program director, department chair and dean meet with the provost and/or SVPHS to review the accreditation process. (Note: Self-study director may replace program director or department chair at this meeting.) This meeting should include a short presentation to the provost and/or SVPHS (for health sciences programs only) with the following information: a review of the accreditation process, expectations for the site visit, self-study highlights, strengths and weaknesses or potential concerns, and anticipated questions from accreditors during the visit.

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3 For an example of Executive Summary organization and content guidance, see the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) “Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Study Report Utilizing the 2017 ACEN Standards and Criteria,” p. 5-6.
Immediately following site visit

If any concerns were noted by the accreditors during the site visit, program director, department chair and dean must schedule a meeting with the provost and/or SVPHS (for health sciences programs only) to review the initial feedback.

Within two weeks of receipt of accreditation report

Program director, chair and dean schedule a meeting with the provost and/or SVPHS (for health sciences programs only) to review accreditation decision.

Relation between program accreditation and VCU academic program review

Program accreditation is separate from VCU academic program review. Although VCU academic program review is required of all accredited programs, accredited programs are eligible for modified VCU program reviews. Please see the VCU Academic Program Review Handbook for details.

CONTACT

Please direct questions to Deborah Noble-Triplett, PhD, senior vice provost for academic affairs (nobletriplett@vcu.edu).
Chapter 16 Policies, regulations and procedures

This chapter covers universitywide policies, procedures and regulations as located in the VCU policy library and academic regulations section of the VCU Bulletin.

Policies and procedures
At VCU, a policy articulates requirements and expectations for behavior, actions and activities of the university community. A policy may require or prohibit an action, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and/or mitigate risk. Procedures are mandatory actions to establish required actions and processes to comply with a policy, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and mitigate risk.

Deans, associate deans, department chairs and program directors should ensure policies and procedures created at the academic unit level align with universitywide policies and procedures. When crafting unit-level policies and procedures, the VCU policy library should be consulted first in order to (a) ensure a policy does not already exist on the topic and (b) if relevant policy or policies do exist, ensure the local and universitywide language aligns. University policies always supersede local policies. Frequently, a universitywide policy does exist already, and the local policy author can save time and reduce confusion by directing readers to the VCU policy library.

University approval process
Shared governance is a key value at VCU and is reflected in the university policy approval process depicted in this flowchart. In addition to the university approval process, academic affairs will typically vet significant policies with other key bodies such as the academic affairs associates Associates Forum, the Faculty Senate and other affected stakeholders. The goal is to seek broad input and buy-in before initiating the official approval process to preserve the value of shared governance. Consequently, policy development is an iterative process in pursuit of the right solution for the VCU community.

Key academic affairs policies to know
VCU stakeholders should be familiar with all universitywide policies. The below policies will be of special interest to deans, associate deans, department chairs and program directors.

- Assessing student learning outcomes in degree and certificate programs
- Substantive change for regional accreditation
- Textbook adoptions and sales

Academic regulations
Academic regulations are located in the VCU Bulletin. Regulations fall into three categories: universitywide, undergraduate-only and graduate-only. As with all universitywide policies, these Bulletin regulations take precedence over individual program regulations. Therefore, local authors of regulations should ensure their products align with those found in the current VCU Bulletin.

Approval and appeal processes
Two standing committees play essential roles in the review, approval and appeals process related to academic regulations. These are standing committees of the Office of the Provost and report to the senior vice provost for academic affairs.
1) Academic Regulations Committee: This committee provides guidance and oversight of the academic regulations governing the undergraduate, graduate and first-professional education at VCU. This committee ensures the regulations of VCU’s academic programs are current and relevant, that they meet the needs of academic units, and clearly state responsibilities and expectations for students. It also offers recommendations to remedy any identified inconsistencies, serving as a conduit between policy and practice.

2) Academic Regulations and Appeals Committee: This committee considers petitions from undergraduate students appealing any regulation in the academic regulations section of the Bulletin. More operational information for ARAC is located here.

Note: Appeals for graduate and professional students are submitted via special action forms and reviewed by the Graduate School.

Key regulations to know
Knowledge of all regulations is required as each regulation can have significant implications for students and faculty. Key regulations of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Universitywide
  - Course drop vs. withdrawal
  - Grade review procedures
  - Grading and marking (including Incompletes)
  - Withdrawal from the university
  - Effective Bulletin

- Undergraduate-only
  - Degree definitions
  - Repeated courses
  - Undergraduate degree requirements

- Graduate-only
  - Satisfactory academic progress
  - Degree definitions
  - Repeated courses

CONTACT
Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, EdD, director for academic programs and policy (atarroyo@vcu.edu).